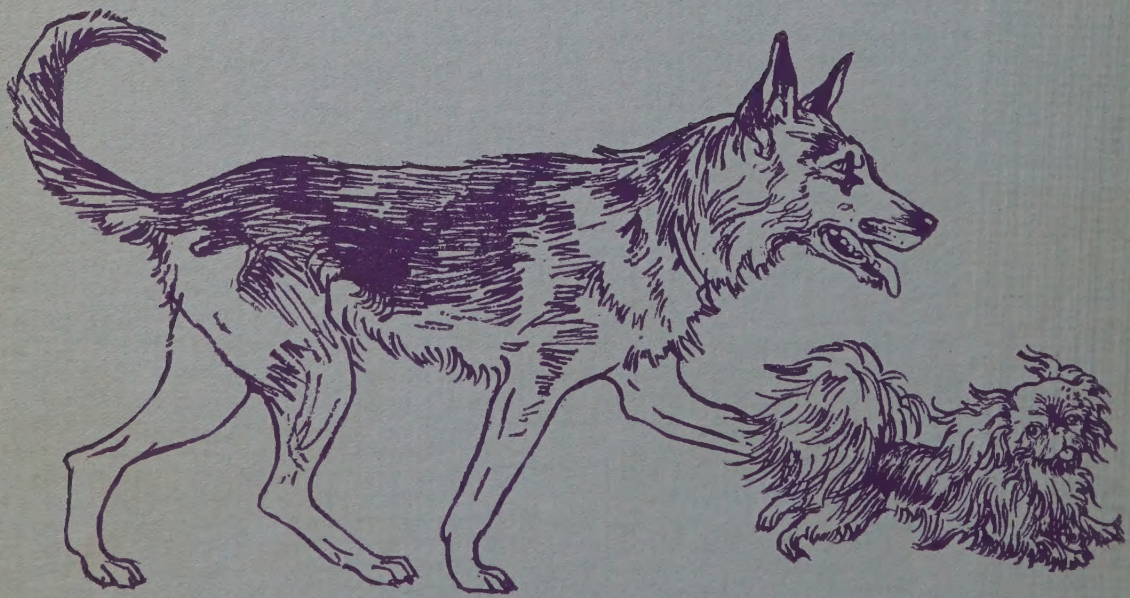
JOCK THE SCOT

ALICE GRANT ROSMAN



JOCK THE SCOT

BY ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

THE WINDOW
VISITORS TO HUGO
THE YOUNG AND SECRET

JOCK THE SCOT

The Mastiff of Brindlea, alias the Lame Lion.

JOCK THE SCOT

The Adventures of the Dog of the House
who gave up Town Life to run
a Country Estate

By
ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOAN ESLEY

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SNATCHER

BOBS

TO
JENNY OF NEW YORK
BUNTY OF CHICAGO
BOBS OF PORTLAND, MAINE
SNATCHER OF LONDON
AND
CHIP OF ADELAIDE

BUNTY

JENNY

CHIP

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The Mastiff of Brindlea, alias the Lame Lion . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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The one-time dog of the house sat weakly in the center of this alien throng 40

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JOCK THE SCOT

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CHAPTER I

A Scottish Gentleman is Bereaved

1

WHEN the telegraph boy knocked loudly at the door, Jock awoke from his dreams and barked. As dog of the house this was his duty and his privilege, and though for months past it had brought him no word from the voice he loved, he continued it faithfully, loyal to the last hair of his black body.

She had gone away. Jock could not understand it, but he was confident she would come back. At night he slept on the mat outside her door, which had never been closed to him before as now it was closed; and last night he had started up from sleep excitedly, quite certain she was behind it. Ears pointed, bright eyes shining, he had barked gently to tell her he was there, and then had flung himself against the door, scratching and crying to her.

She had not let him in, however, and Cook had come out in a flurry of anger and carried him to the kitchen, shutting him in.

"Give me the creeps, that's what you do," said Cook,

looking fearfully behind her up the dark passage. "Now, hold your din, do, and let a body get a bit of rest."

By morning the house was just as it had been for weeks, as cold and silent as the dead. At first after she went away, it had been polished and tended as of old, the windows opened and the autumn air let in, but now Grace sat gossiping with Cook all day, when she wasn't tossing her head at Albert, lounging at the kitchen door or loafing in the garage.

What was the sense of killing yourself, they said, scrubbing and cleaning for nothing at all? A wicked waste, that's what it was. It wasn't as though it could do her any good, they agreed. One good clear-out as soon as she was on the mend, and they would have it looking spick and span again, but those nurses they were a close lot and would tell you nothing. Every morning Cook rang up the nursing home and asked for the mistress, then sniffed at the answer she received.

"Much as usual." . . . "No change." . . . "A more restful night." . . . "As well as can be expected."

This ceaseless repetition had dulled the concern of the three human members of her household. Only the fourth, who knew nothing of nursing homes, or telephones, waited for her in perfect faith, and did his job as of old.

Like the house, he was not as immaculate as he had been when she went away, and though this added to his misery, it was no fault of his. At first he had had his weekly bath

at the hands of Albert, and Grace, being thinner than Cook and more able for the task, had brushed his coat every day. She had even, once or twice, taken him out for a run in the park, but these things like everything else had ceased to be a matter of routine. Albert, growing lawless and masterful, was usually off on his own affairs, with or without the car, and when Cook protested he let her know she was no mistress of his. Instead of bathing Jock, he kicked him when he had a chance by way of showing that he would not be ruled by a pack of women. Grace, meanwhile, had begun to walk out with a soldier from the barracks, and needed all her attention for him when she walked in the park. Though she brushed Jock now and then in a burst of good nature, she did not often remember him, her mind being engrossed in the knotty problem of bringing her soldier to the point.

Cook, a kindly soul, looked to his food and gave him a word from time to time, but bathing and brushing dogs was no part of her work and she was too fat for it. Nevertheless, he knew she was a friend, and when the silence told him she was alone he would creep into her warm kitchen and lie at her feet.

Grace opened the door to the telegraph boy, snatched the envelope from him with frightened eyes, and ran with the message to Cook, who tore it open, trembling. The dog of the house, sitting wistfully under the hall table, heard a babel of exclamations and a burst of emotional tears.

Creeping to Cook's feet, he raised his voice in sympathy, and the two women hushed for a moment, looking at the little terrier and then instinctively up the stairs.

"*He* knows," whispered Grace, nodding her head.

"Last night he was at her door crying something cruel," said Cook, "and I said to myself, that's a sign, I said. Come into the kitchen and make me a cup of tea, Gracie, there's a good soul. A fair turn it's give me, not that I wasn't as you might say prepared. When a dog howls it always comes. Mark my words, I said, we'll hear bad news in the morning. Pull down the blinds first, dearie. We must do what is right."

"You come with me, Cook," pleaded Grace, "I'm that nervous."

They went together, talking in hushed voices, and Jock followed at their heels, sniffing the air and sensing in every fiber of him that this was some intimate concern of his.

The dining and drawing-rooms they darkened first, then, clutching each other, they mounted to her room and turned the handle of her door. Jock rushed past them, pushing it open; then began a distressful hunt for her, retreating at last under the bed in disappointment and despair.

"You'll have to 'old 'im," whispered Cook, "but don't you leave me, Grace. My 'eart's that bad, I couldn't abear it. . . . There! we'll lock it, dearie. That would be only right."

It was done at last; the house had closed its eyes in decorous memory of the mistress who would trouble it no more. Jock was carried away to the kitchen by the two women for company; they made tea as they waited impatiently for Albert, and Cook produced a bone. Jock sniffed it, carried it into a corner, then dropped it without interest. What were bones to him?

Albert at last! They ran to greet him, drama written on their faces. Clamor and argument filled the kitchen. Jock slipped out.

The grass of the lawn had been too long uncut; weeds were thick among the asters along the fence, and beginning to show in the gravel; tools were flung here and there.

"You did ought to clear it up for your own sake, that you did," said Cook to Albert, flinging out the kitchen door. "Termorrer, he'll be here, and it won't look right, the place being all to sixes and sevens."

"Hold yer noise," said Albert rudely. "I'm off after this place in the country while I got the chance. You mind your business and I'll mind mine. Pack er wimmen!"

Albert threw open the garage and brought out the car. Jock, suddenly hopeful, ran to investigate. He did not like the man, but the car was a friend; perhaps it was going to bring her home.

Albert saw the little dog, glanced cautiously at the kitchen, for fear of witnesses, then opened one of the doors of the car, whistling seductively. Full of excitement Jock

jumped in. Two minutes later the house with closed eyes was left behind and Albert was threading the traffic of London on the way to the country. He thought he knew a fellow in Surrey who would buy the dog, and how was anyone going to know? From there he would go on to apply for this new situation. If questions were asked about the dog when the lawyer came he would know nothing. The women, he would say, were responsible. They must have let him out.

2

Through London and outer London, through Richmond to the Portsmouth Road, a black Scots terrier drove that autumn day, sitting like a lord in his limousine, with a uniformed chauffeur at the wheel. Ears well up, and tongue out, he panted happily, for how often had he driven like this beside Her? There could be no doubt of it. They were going to bring Her home.

The day was inclined to storm, and gray clouds raced across a windy sky; the trees stretching on either hand for many miles were crimson, and their leaves as they fell drifted ahead as though seeking a place to rest, knowing their work was done. By one o'clock a thin rain was falling fast.

"The Cow and Thistle" offered refreshment, and Albert drew up and went in for his lunch. The passenger put two

paws on the window and peered after him, but as though he knew this was no place for Her, he returned to his seat to wait. Other cars sped by and sometimes he barked at them, but half-heartedly and more from envy than ill-feeling, the wait was so long. An hour or more passed, but still Albert gossiped, for what was the hurry, after all? he said. Jock at last lifted his voice to protest.

"Hi, you're keeping your gentleman waitin'," said a wit from the door. Albert, to show his independence, told the gentleman roughly to hold his din, then dawdled for another hour.

At last the dog of the house was driven on again, without pause, but none too carefully, until they came to a village in Surrey where Albert's first disappointment met him. The fellow who was expected to buy the terrier had moved away, and nobody else cared to pay money for a dog in such dubious company.

Some merely shook non-committal heads, but others looked at the splendid car and the chauffeur's livery with suspicion and asked leading questions about the ownership of Jock the Scot.

"Think he's stole, do yer?" said Albert, shaking a fist at the village, but too wise to wait for an answer. By now thoroughly out of temper and scowling at his poor luck, he set off across country into Sussex, pulling up at last near the gates of an imposing house.

He left the car and its black passenger in a lane and

swaggered up the drive, but when he returned his face was red and rage was written all over him.

Jock, having experience of these moods, sat quiet. They started on again.

The dog of the house was losing his elation. He had been long hours in the car and they had not found Her. Through a partly open window a cold and bitter wind blew in, and after it the rain. He coiled himself unhappily in a corner, with one eye watching the darkening world.

Albert needed more refreshment and drew up again to seek it. It was a long business and when at length it was completed premature night had come down with the storm. Rain lashed the windows; lightning rent the sky. Careful people driving home through the downpour turned out the way of a car with headlights full on, running at a reckless pace, along the road to London.

Nobody heard the crash. Albert, skidding on the muddy road, took a telegraph pole in his stride and was knocked unconscious, and at first in the darkness of a stormy night the wreckage was not seen. When the moon rose, however, a passing motorist discovered it, lifted the chauffeur out and drove him to hospital, but he did not discover the little passenger.

Stunned at first and shaken, cut by splintered glass, drenched by the rain, Jock had finally fought himself free of his prison, and set out to continue his quest on foot. He had not found Her, but he was not beaten yet.

The storm was over at last, and the cold wind of the dawn dried his coat as he limped along. Mud and pieces of wreckage clung to him; the pain of his injured leg made him pause from time to time and lift his voice and complain; he ached all over and perhaps his valiant purpose became dim. Utterly done, he turned into a nest of bracken, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

He Follows a Lady Who Does not Look Back

1

THE village of Ferris Minor lies just over the Hampshire border in Sussex, fifteen miles from the sea. The outer world knows nothing about it, and this its politer residents consider its greatest charm. Motor coaches and touring cars take another road two miles away through Ferris Royale, to which a passing Sovereign gave the title centuries ago for some reason now forgotten. Here are the ruins of an ancient Abbey, as well as a Gothic market-place and a Norman church.

Ferris Minor has none of these things.

It is high country and from above the village you can see on your left the rolling downs, on your right, when the weather is clear, the English Channel; wooded country too. The village itself lies in a hollow—one narrow twisting street of litttle cottages, the church with its garden of gray stones, the vicarage and the inn. A few larger houses, neither manors nor villa-residences, but something between the two, radiate from it, with the semicircle of the woods

behind. No great estate dominates Ferris Minor, though Brindlea has most claim to do so, since it has belonged to the Perch family for two hundred years. The property is small now, for the entail was cut after the war and all but thirty acres sold. The home farm, bought by Colonel Ivery, has to-day finer gardens than Brindlea's own, and is a farm no longer. The West Lodge houses Mr. and Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, who live on their friends and are surprisingly frank about it. The Willisons built their house on one-time Brindlea acres and it is rather red in the face. They call it The Dene, though nobody has discovered why.

A few weeks before that autumn day when Jock set out from London, two people were added to the little community at Ferris Minor. One of these was the new owner of Brindlea, Roger Perch, who had inherited the place from a distant cousin and had come home from British Columbia to take possession. So far he had been actually on the scene for only half a day, and had then gone back to London, but he was expected to return at any moment, and the local families awaited him with animation and talked of little else. He was unmarried and Ferris Minor was delighted to hear it.

"So wise of him," said Mrs. Ivery to Mrs. Chancellor, the vicar's wife, as one mother to another.

This might be a charming place to live in on a small income, so healthy, and with fishing and golf to keep the men amused, but one had to think of one's girls.

Neither Mrs. Ivery nor Mrs. Chancellor put this thought into words, but they understood each other and it is to be feared their graceless daughters understood them too.

"See our happy parents?" said Lal Chancellor, who looked like a round eyed cherub and was not. "I wonder they don't toss for the lad and be done with it. Joyce, old thing, we're entered for the Perch stakes, you take my word for it."

"You can have him," responded Joyce Ivery, fondling her spaniel's silken ears. It was a safe offer and she knew it. Lal had other fish to fry. Joyce envied her friend, but impersonally. She herself was gruff and shy and in her own eyes terribly unattractive. She was convinced Roger Perch would take no interest in her and that she would not know what to say to him if he did. Much more likely he would spend most of his time with Beth Willison, who had stunning clothes and a car of her own.

The second newcomer was Gillian Ivery, but, perhaps because she was still so much a stranger to them all, nobody thought of her. Gillian was the only child of Colonel Ivery's younger brother, an artist of some repute who had lived for years abroad and recently died in France. They had never seen the girl until Colonel Ivery brought her home. She was twenty and knew little of the land of her birth. Bewildered by her loss, and by the ways of these strange people who had taken her in, Gillian, aware that they in turn looked upon her with faint disapproval, kept

herself in the background as much as she could. There would be very little money for her, she knew, and as soon as she was twenty-one and the mistress of it, she meant to work for her living. She would have liked to go into training right away, but her uncle would not hear of that and laughed at her plans. As long as he lived or until she married there would be a home for her at Ferris, he said, and considered the matter closed. Few men are practical where the marriage of their girls is concerned. They seem to think when the right moment comes, the right husband will drop out of the clouds.

Gillian had no views about marriage for herself. She had not thought of it except as something infinitely remote, for the close companionship with her father ever since her school days ended, had made her at once older and younger than her years. She was wise in ways that would have amazed her relatives, but ignorant of most of the standards they understood. Her father's reputation was a matter of pride to her, but no one here seemed to think that he had been a great artist, or mentioned his work. They almost avoided the subject, kindly, as an eccentricity to be overlooked.

Her uncle's collection of birds' eggs, they told her, however, was one of the most famous in the world; and her aunt's pekinese, Chinko, had won championships and prizes without number.

Gillian thought robbing birds' nests a curious life-work

for a man. As for Chinko, the little golden dog was beautiful but supercilious; perhaps too many prizes had turned his head. Micky, the spaniel who belonged to Joyce, was better but inclined to be sentimental. Gillian would have preferred a more manly dog. Lal Chancellor owned an Airedale puppy, a rather jolly beast, and Beth Willison an Alsatian, and there was a good deal of rivalry about all these creatures. Lal's Wog was considered boisterous by the Iverys, and Lal made no secret of the fact that she thought Micky a soppy fool. The Alsatian's name was Milord, which everyone but the Willisons considered as ostentatious as the dog himself. The Bryce-Spencers alone of the little circle owned no dog. They could not, said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer jovially, afford it. She was a large, loud-voiced woman with a roving eye which she never kept still. She was forever peering round the room, or the garden, or the road as though in search of something. Her husband was shorter than she and looked ill-tempered; she talked a great deal, while he rarely spoke. They were the kind of people Gillian's father would have kept at a safe distance, but here everyone accepted them without remark. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer was known to be well connected and talked of Lord This and That.

It never seemed to occur to their friends to wonder how the Lords in question regarded *her*, but Gillian had her own ideas about it. Her relatives were very innocent, she thought.

2

The day after the storm Mrs. Bryce-Spencer was in high delight, for hounds were to meet at Ferris Royale next morning and the Willisons had promised to mount her for bringing it off. She came in to the Iverys to tell them all about it. A fox had been seen in Brindlea Wood and she had spoken to the Master. It would be perfect hunting weather. This also she seemed to have arranged.

The news was greeted with joy, and it was agreed that Mrs. Bryce-Spencer most certainly deserved the brush. The Iverys would of course follow in the car, and Mrs. Ivery explained to Gillian this would be a real treat for her. A meet was such a pretty sight.

Gillian turned pale.

"But I think it is brutal," she stammered. "How can you bear it . . . the poor beast being torn to pieces?"

"My dear!" protested her aunt in a shocked voice. "What a very un-English thing to say! And of course foxes must be destroyed. It is a necessity."

"They could be shot," said Gillian.

"Sensation!" Mrs. Bryce-Spencer exclaimed violently. Joyce cried, "You vandal!" and her mother pursed her lips and looked pained at a sentiment so foreign to all the best English traditions.

"You have been abroad so long that you look at things

differently, my dear," she said to Gillian, "but please don't say that to anyone again. It would be misunderstood."

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer hoped Mr. Perch would be a hunting man. "It would make such a difference," she said. Had Colonel Ivery seen him yet? "Yes," said her hostess, "having known his cousin so well, the Colonel had called at once, but Mr. Perch was only at Brindlea for an hour or two and returning to London. He expected to come down this week for good."

"Then Charles must run in this afternoon in case he has turned up," said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, making ready to be off. "He should not miss the meet, and besides we are mere tenants, not people of property like the rest of you lucky folk. Our landlord must be treated with respect."

With one of her habitual wandering looks and a good deal of noisy laughter, she departed.

Nothing more was said to Gillian about the vexed question. The subject was changed and they did not try to convince her of her error; people's prejudices were their own affairs; but next morning they set off for the meet without her, full of excitement, taking Chinko and Micky and a picnic lunch. Gillian was left forlorn.

Unable to stay in the house, she put on her hat and coat and went out for a long walk, taking as far as she could tell the opposite direction and hoping to avoid the hunt. Though she had spoken from conviction and would do it again, she felt guilty and foolish and in disgrace,

and lonelier than she had ever been in her life. What could she say to these people or they to her? She knew that they were kind, but they seemed to speak a different tongue . . . or was the fault in her?

Her father had never been like this; they had shared so many things, he and she—the delight of sunlight under the trees; a windy sky; the beauty of words; nightingales—they had tramped miles to hear one—the glitter and rush of great cities; a peasant woman driving her donkey down the hill; the wild talk of wilder spirits into the dawn; the companionable silences of a friend; work and yet more work, and then suddenly a holiday springing out of the blue, as it were, and taking them unawares.

A terrible longing for him tore her heart, and desolation descended upon her, shutting out the lovely autumn world, but she knew this would not do.

Lifting her head with resolution she reminded herself that this was his country and her own which they had so often planned to see together, and tried to believe that he was walking beside her in an English lane at last.

She was out of sight of the house now and the stillness and the solitude were kind. She stopped to pick a sprig of holly and a robin hopped out of the wood and stood looking at her with his head on one side, his little breast almost as red as the holly-berries and the leaves beneath her feet. Gillian very cautiously dropped on one knee and held out her hand. The robin hopped nearer, but this

was merely flirtatious on his part, and soon he was off again, side-stepping up the lane and pausing to dig for a worm, as much as to say he was not afraid of her.

She followed him, smiling, and he seemed to be leading her on as once the ravens led Alexander into Asia. The robin's Asia was merely the top of the rise, for here he deserted her, and Gillian, turning to watch him go, caught her breath in delight. Below her the woods ran like a flame to be lost at last in the gray-blue distance of the downs. Here and there a huddled village or a tall spire broke the contour, and to the left, where the woods fell away, there was spread out a crazy pattern of little fields, stitched by their hedges in a deeper green.

A keen wind blew in her face, bringing her the scent of moist earth and bracken, and presently something more, the echo of a call far off and the thin sweet music of a horn.

It could not be real, of course; she must have dreamt it, that silver sound, and she stood in a rapt enchantment, straining her ears lest it should come again. Suddenly away on the road to her right she saw a patch of moving scarlet and understood.

It was the hunt . . . she had forgotten the hunt.

"A meet is such a pretty sight," her aunt had said.

Gillian, pressed back in the ditch where she could not be seen, looked wistfully along the road. The sun caught the horse's glossy side, the huntsman's red coat,

and streaming out of the wood the little black and white hounds with their thin, upstanding tails. She was glad she had seen it, for after all they had not yet found the poor fox, and perhaps they never would. As the road below filled with other scarlet figures and she saw that they were heading in her direction, however, she knew that she must go and, darting into the wood through which they had come, she ran for cover. This should lead her back to Ferris Minor as far as she could tell, and the fox could not be here or they would have scented him. There was no fear of their coming back. Gillian knew nothing of the importance of the wind in these matters, and for half an hour she loafed in the lovely wood, amber where the sunlight pierced it, deep red in the shade.

At last she saw the road before her and strolled towards it, coming out behind a small car, over which a young man was bending. She had never seen him before and she sat down on the edge of the wood, watching him idly. The road to Ferris Minor was narrow and she wanted it to herself. Better wait, she thought, until he went on again.

He was in tweeds, and hatless, and once she had a glimpse of his face, which was aquiline and rather brown. She wondered where he had come from and where he was going, for the back of the little car was filled with packages and between them a suitcase standing on end. It must be jolly to be a young man with a car, running

about the world like this, instead of a girl set down among strangers with nothing to do. Gillian was not used to idleness, and again nostalgia for the old days wrapped her round. They too had had a little car and once had driven along the Grande Corniche in the dawn, above the sleeping villas, above Monte Carlo, above Monaco Harbor, where the great white yachts looked like toy boats in a silver bath.

Gillian sighed, coming back to the present, as the young man got into his car and prepared to be off. She envied him dreadfully. The next moment she was aware of a rushing sound, and something large and red flashed past her eyes, landing almost on top of the young man in the car. She saw him clutch it, there was a struggle and a faint laugh, then a rug was flung over the creature and the car had gone on.

Gillian stared after it in surprise. Was she dreaming or awake? Stumbling to her feet, she looked about her, bewildered, and saw a white streak rushing towards her through the wood. Then she knew. It had been the fox flying for cover, and the young man had driven off with him in his car. He wasn't going to give it up then. . . . He had laughed . . . he didn't care for the hunt.

Joy filled her. The fox would go free, and somehow she felt less alone now; she knew that she had a fellow vandal.

He was racing along at a great pace, and she laughed

From time to time he stopped, panting unhappily, then pushed on after the swinging skirts ahead.

as the hounds came through to the road, turning her back on them and walking quickly home. The hounds, nonplussed at losing the scent, made off into the further wood.

As they went, something else limped out into the road and, with ears pointed, endeavored to run on three of his four short legs after the figure of the girl. He was a strange spectacle. What had once been a black and shining coat was now caked with mud and grime to a dull ginger shade; one front paw was bloody and swollen to twice its right dimensions, and the eyes above it were dim with pain. From time to time he stopped, panting unhappily, then pushed on after the swinging skirts ahead. This was the first reassuring sight that had met his gaze in thirty-six hours, but he was weak from hunger and pain, and she was walking fast.

The young man and his car were long since out of sight; the birds sang noisily and Gillian's heart sang with them. When at last she reached her uncle's gate and closed it behind her, she had not once looked back.

CHAPTER III

He is Assaulted and Left for Dead

1

THE dog of the house, driven from the London road by the rush of cars and char-à-bancs the day before and into the woods in search of food, which in his battered condition he was unable to run to earth, had staggered on uncertainly, sleeping at last when darkness came in a kindly ditch on the road to Ferris Minor. This morning he had not gone very far, but from time to time retreated to the ditch again to sleep and nurse his injured paw. He had not found Her whom he sought, and perhaps he was no longer conscious of any purpose as he followed Gillian Ivery. It may have been hunger that drove him on. At the gate through which she had passed, he scratched with all his strength, but it was no good, and though he barked once sharply, she did not come back. The sun was warm here, however, and Jock, though bred for country ways, was a town dog. The gate seemed to give him reassurance, and he lay down before it, until the sound of running water pierced his dreams and he

started up. He followed the sound and drank thirstily from a little runnel in the road, then, feeling refreshed, limped on to investigate. Thus he found himself looking down into the village of Ferris Minor.

The narrow street was empty at the moment, but houses meant food. Jock took the center of the road and, quivering with renewed hope, went to see. A small car speeding round the bend nearly ran over him, and its driver leaned out and reproached him as he passed. Jock, backing away with one foot in the air, looked after him regretfully, for the young man's voice had been kind. The voices of Ferris Minor, however, were something else. The village, having finished its mid-day meal, awoke to life just as he arrived there. Children flocking out on their way back to school and indignant shopkeepers hunted the visitor off, emphasizing their wrath with a shower of stones. The dog of the house, as though he knew at last that he was an outcast in a hostile world, growled and retreated, showing his teeth, and in that unlikely moment found a friend. A lad, who had been lounging in a doorway, eating a thick chunk of bread, slipped out and caught the little black dog under his arm. His grasp was firm but careful, his rough coat warm. Jock, lifting an eager nose to sniff the bread, was given a piece and swallowed it hungrily.

"Starvin', that's what you are," said the boy, who had retreated with his prize to a shed out of sight, and now

put him down to look him over. Another piece of bread was offered and despatched in a second. Jock wagged his tail, pleading for more. The boy, looking this way and that, found a piece of sacking and pushed it into a corner invitingly.

"Now you lay there," he commanded, making for the door and closing it after him.

Jock, as though he understood silence was imperative, did not make a sound.

The boy returned at last carrying water in a rusty tin and crusts of bread, which he soaked for his guest. All the while he kept a wary eye on the door and when the last crumb was finished began, very carefully, to pick the sticks and pieces of broken glass out of the dog's coat. During the process he felt the little plate on the collar, and turning it round tried to read what was on it, but the light was too dim. That there was a name, however, confirmed the boy's suspicions. This was no stray mongrel, but a lost dog. There would be money in it if They would only let him be.

He had not perhaps very much faith in Them, whoever they were, for directly he heard voices he closed the shed silently and lifted Jock on to his piece of sacking. He leaned a piece of loose board against the corner to hide him from view and, waiting until the little dog lay quiet, crept out, tip-toed round the house, and sauntered in as though from the street.

2

They were back from the meet in time for tea, Lal Chancellor in attendance. Chinko yawned in his mistress's arms as she lifted him out of the car; Micky ran to Gillian, who had come rather shyly to meet them.

"We've had such a day. Aren't you sorry you didn't come?" asked Joyce in her sharp way.

"No, oh no . . . thank you," faltered Gillian. "Did . . . did you kill it?"

She saw by their laughter that she had said something foolish again though she did not know what.

"Saint George and the Dragon," said Lal, striking a martial attitude. "No . . . we didn't kill. The dragon bunked."

"Lal dear, where do you hear such slang?" protested Mrs. Ivery kindly.

"From father," said Lal in an innocent tone, and put her arm round Joyce. "Come along. Tea, or I shall die."

They went indoors, talking together of the day's adventures and leaving Gillian to follow, but she did not mind. She too had had an adventure, and she smiled to herself, thinking of a young man driving through England with the "dragon" under his rug.

Her uncle had not returned with the rest of them and, when he did come in, he brought news.

"Well, my dear, young Perch has arrived. I've just had a word with him, and as he is all alone, I have asked him to come in to tea to-morrow afternoon. We needn't stand on ceremony, and perhaps these girls will give him a game of tennis if the fine weather holds."

"Of course, James. What a good idea," agreed Mrs. Ivery. She was always an approving wife. "It was very thoughtful of you. Poor lad, we must make him feel at home."

Gillian wondered why he was a poor lad, but she did not ask. They had such queer standards in this place.

She had sometimes, in passing, looked up the Brindlea drive, and the old gray house with its worn balustrades had charmed her sight. It had an air at once spacious and serene. "How, owning that, could anyone be poor?" she asked herself.

3

Roger Perch, to do him justice, was feeling extremely rich and much surprised at his own good fortune. He had expected his cousin to live for another twenty years, and there had always been the possibility that he would marry again and have sons. Roger had felt his own claims to Brindlea small, and after the past lean years of real hard work—fruit-growing in British Columbia—this was affluence. The place was rather neglected and the income

modest, but these things did not trouble him much, for mending both would give him something to do. An estate, all neat and tidy and a revenue rolling in would have been too smug for his taste, and already he was full of schemes.

His neighbors seemed friendly too, and after his years abroad he was grateful for this, glad to find his own country less frigid than the rest of the world was inclined to paint it. He had been a mere lad when he went away and satirical spirits had dealt severely with his British reserve and his insular prejudices. Roger luckily could enjoy a joke and, when the solemnity of youth had worn away, he had made friends in the most unlikely places. Having come from a scattered community where women were outnumbered, he did not grasp the fact that here he was to be that *rara avis*, an unattached young man. He thought it kind of Colonel Ivery to look him up . . . a nice old boy, and the vicar, following on the Colonel's heels, though absent-minded, seemed a pleasant fellow. He was devoted to fishing and had given him advice on the subject for half an hour.

Strolling a little way through the village with him and then going back alone, Roger Perch had seen his inheritance, much as Gillian saw it, with a stranger's eyes. Yes, most certainly he felt rich.

At the gates, yet another resident hailed him, introducing herself boisterously with a double name which he did not catch.

"Charles and I are the two paupers who rent your West Lodge, Mr. Perch—a mere cupboard, but it keeps the rain out. Your cousin was always good to the poor and saw that we had vegetables to our broth and a bird occasionally. But how refreshing to have a young landlord," said the lady, fixing her wandering glance upon him for a moment and smiling with her teeth. "Now tell me, are you a hunting man? That is the great question, for you missed the meet to-day, you foolish fellow. Hounds found in Brindlea woods but the brute got away."

"Not really?" enquired Roger Perch without a smile. "Splendid!"

"Now, now," said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, tapping him with her walking-stick. "Naughty! You know better than that. You *are* a hunting man. . . . Why, you have the very figure for it. . . . Don't tell me."

Roger had no intention of telling her anything. He had seen the woman riding back from the hunt, and to follow the hounds and beg for your food struck him as a novel combination. She should have been kinder to the fox, who, if he knew anything, was a close relative.

"But dear me, I must not stand gossiping here, for we still have our Grundies, even in Ferris Minor," she declared with an arch look. "Now remember, I shall expect you to mount me, dear Mr. Perch. Au 'voir."

Roger laughed. He did not propose to join the hunt, though he had no prejudices against it, and his own inter-

ference in the drama this morning had been inadvertent. Old Reynard had sought sanctuary in his car, and it had amused him to accept this challenge. He had run him over the Hampshire border and let him go free; unneighborly to Hampshire, perhaps, but that could not be helped.

Meeting Burrows, the gardener, he asked him if it was an established custom of the house to send vegetables to the tenants at the West Lodge.

Burrows surveyed the new owner from out of a pair of shrewd blue eyes.

"Ast you already, 'as she, sir?" enquired Burrows in a manner half cynical, half protective.

Perch said smiling, "The lady gave me a hint."

"'Int . . . yes, they're pretty good at 'ints . . . and hinsults," said Burrows with feeling. "The late master 'e gave 'em a bit 'ere and there for peace and quietness, and got neither. Since 'e was took, she's pretty well over-run the place and I'm fair sick of 'er complaints. Accused me of providin' for me friends out of the gardin because the runner beans was not to 'er likin'. 'No, mum,' I says, 'my friends can pay their way.' As fer the runner-beans, Mrs. Ivery, 'oo's a lady, bought them off me, and I put the money into new plants for the glass-'ouses, seeing as you wasn't 'ere, sir."

"That's right, Burrows. Carry on."

"What, sir—with them Bryce-Spencers from the Lodge?"

"Yes, of course—when there is anything we can spare."

Master and servant exchanged a look of understanding.

"Very good, sir," said Burrows.

Perch, going on to the house, was amused and curious, wondering what the other residents thought of his tenant. It had not been advisable to ask old Burrows that, though it was likely, he thought, Burrows knew most things about the neighborhood. He was a Cockney and sharper-witted than the country-born . . . and sharper-tongued. His wife was the housekeeper, and when you got under her gentility, which Perch found highly entertaining, as sharp as her Bill. In a mood to be pleased with everything about his new inheritance, he had won the staff at Brindlea in an hour, for like all whose fate it is to serve for a wage, they were relentless critics of their rulers and would have resented a new broom.

4

Several times during the afternoon, when the coast was clear, Jock's rescuer came to his hiding-place, with such offerings of food as he could lay hands on, and was welcomed by a wildly wagging tail and an eloquent glance from a pair of dark eyes. The boy's interest in his find was entirely commercial, experience having taught him that he had as much hope of keeping an elephant as a dog of his own. Next day, with luck, he meant to slip off with

him to Ferris Royale and deliver him at the police station, in the hope of a reward, but first he had the wit to see the terrier must be made as presentable as possible.

Jock found his new friend's methods rough and ready, but at least the jagged pieces of glass were removed from his matted coat, and some of the mud scraped away. These operations, however, were interrupted by angry voices from the cottage at last, and Jock was hidden in his corner again with many fiercely whispered warnings to be still.

Instinct and inclination presuaded him to obey this order. For the first night in three he had at least some rest for his sore and aching body, and the comfort of food, however meager, inside him. The boy had given these things, and his word was law.

Jock could not know that fate had brought him into rather lower human society than he had yet encountered, the late Albert notwithstanding. His unconscious host of the moment was the most regular customer of "the Red Lion," and practised violence on his family after closing hours from time to time to show his scorn of a government that wouldn't let a man have his beer when he wanted it, which was all the time.

Unfortunately for the financial schemes of his son, and for the luckless object of them, he had that night a special celebration. The riot began in the street, from which, however, the rest of the village retired abruptly. The enemy of the Government was therefore forced to concentrate his

forces on the domestic hearth, and the din woke Jock from his dreams.

True to his training as dog of the house, he was up in a moment, barking furiously, and that was his undoing. The drunkard having reduced his household to a momentary silence, lurched out, cursing this further voice raised against his lawful authority, and as he reached the shed door the boy was upon him.

"You leave 'im be. 'E's mine."

At sound of his friend's cry, Jock redoubled his efforts, and as the shed door burst open, flung himself valiantly upon the enemy, but might prevailed. Kicked and battered almost to insensibility, he was lifted high and flung far into the street.

The enemy, as though soothed by his own savagery, retired to rest.

The moon rose over Ferris Minor as the boy crept out to the still black figure lying in the middle of the road. He touched it but it did not move; pushed it over with a not ungentle foot, and it lay still, a dark stain like a shadow beside it.

Done for, thought the boy. Dead or dying, it was all one to him now, and he slouched dispiritedly in to bed.

Jock was stunned, but there was a glimmer of life in him yet, and when the first carts went by in the dawn he gathered himself up with a desperate effort and crawled away. Clotted blood clung to the hair about his eyes; there was

an ugly cut on his head, and he lifted his nose in a bewildered fashion, peering out, half blind with agony, upon the world which had become all at once a place of torture. Halting every few yards, he came at length to the gate where the day before he had slept in the sun, and this time fate was kind, for the gate was open.

A maid returning later than the rule allowed from her evening out, had left it swinging in her haste, and thereby provided a miracle for a little black dog.

Perhaps he remembered that yesterday this place had seemed a haven to him, for he dragged himself into the Iverys' garden and under one of the Colonel's prized rhododendrons found sanctuary at last.

CHAPTER IV

He Goes to a Party Uninvited and is not Well Received

1

THE slower the village the faster news travels in it. Within an hour of his arrival everyone in Ferris Minor knew that Roger Perch had come to Brindlea and this time for good. By evening all who were interested had also learned that he would play tennis at the Iverys' on the following afternoon.

Mrs. Ivery, instructing her cook to bake some special cakes for what was to be merely an informal party, little knew she was to be favored by several uninvited guests.

The day was fair; the woods glowed in the sunshine; tall chrysanthemums marching down each side of a narrow strip of lawn made a brave show before the house; huge bowls of flowers and autumn leaves set off the gray and lavender drawing-room. The tennis court had been freshly rolled and marked, and racquets and balls were flung carelessly on the refectory table in the hall. Just the right note, thought Mrs. Ivery, who wished the guest to feel

immediately at home and know they were not treating him with ceremony.

Joyce too, in her russet jumper, with Micky following at her heels, looked, thought her mother, exactly what she was, a nice sensible country girl with no nonsense about her and no rouge on her cheeks. Her manner was a little sharp, it was true—blunt rather, but wasn't that after all the modern way?

Even the dogs had been prepared for the occasion. Chinko, wearing a golden bow at his neck, looked more than ever conscious of illustrious descent, and walked after his mistress imperiously, grumbling when he was not noticed. Micky's disorderly curls had been brushed till they shone and he had been kept rigorously in doors all the morning. He submitted to this boring procedure out of sheer kindness to the powers that ruled him. Micky was of a very amiable disposition and often therefore put upon by Chinko, who would rout him out of a favorite seat by jumping on it and muttering at him in an undertone like a fractious child. This was generally considered clever of Chinko and Micky received no praise for his good nature, but he bore nobody any malice. When Chinko had pushed him jealously first out of one comfortable chair and then another he lay on the floor.

The arrival of Lal Chancellor and her Wog this afternoon awakened Micky to the fact that up till now the day had been dull beyond expression. Wog, covered with short

tight curls, was at a ridiculous age and full of exuberance. He fell upon Micky with growls of infant joy and they rolled about the drawing-room and then bolted round it, while Chinko sat throned and aloof, regarding them with his nose in the air. Such childishness disgusted him.

Mrs. Ivery agreed with Chinko and sternly called them to order, and peace had scarcely been restored when the guest of the afternoon was ushered in.

Gillian, standing in the background, so that Joyce and Lal and even the three dogs were introduced before her, recognized Roger Perch at once and longed to laugh. So this was the fox's friend? She had never dreamt of such a thing and she began to feel interested in the new owner of Brindlea for the first time and to wish she had been going to play tennis after all. She was no match for the other girls at the game and had easily persuaded her uncle to take her place. He was rather proud of his spare figure and excellent condition, and Mrs. Ivery had applauded the idea.

"After all, dear, as you don't care for a game . . . and it will be nicer perhaps for Mr. Perch to have another man."

The Colonel came in, racquets and balls were collected, and the players set out for the court, Gillian and her aunt following with the dogs. At this moment, there strode upon the scene Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, her face wreathed in appro-

priate surprise, and her voice carrying half across the garden.

"Dear Mrs. Ivery, I merely ran in to beg a recipe, and here I find you giving a party. How very embarrassing," she shouted in her hearty way.

Mrs. Ivery protested that she was doing nothing of the kind and, hiding her annoyance, turned to introduce Roger Perch. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, however, was already grasping his hand.

"What, we meet again so soon, Mr. Landlord," she cried, "but how wonderful! Mr. Perch is going to be so *good* to the poor . . . he has promised faithfully, Mrs. Ivery. Isn't that sweet of him? I have told him he must join the hunt—we shall insist upon it—and he is going to mount poor little me."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Ivery with reserve. She had been sorry for Mrs. Bryce-Spencer in the past, for she took people at their face value, but this appropriation of Roger Perch struck her as in questionable taste, and she almost disliked the woman. A married woman, too. Really, it was not nice.

Perch looked at his tenant with a grave face.

"You flatter me, I am afraid," he said. "Mrs. — do forgive me, I didn't catch your name. . . . We have no horses at Brindlea, alas, so I shall not be able to live up to your generous expectations of me. It is very humiliating to me to have to admit it, of course."

"Now, now," exclaimed Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, showing her teeth. "You are a tease, I can see."

"I? Oh no, really," said Roger, assuming an embarassed and serious air. At the same moment he looked past Mrs. Bryce-Spencer and met a pair of arresting gray eyes in a pale face. Their owner was aware of a ghost of wink before Joyce broke in sharply:

"Well, if you are going to play tennis, hadn't we better play it?"

"Yes, do, dears," said Mrs. Ivery in a voice of relief.

2

They had barely begun to move before an uproar from the three dogs broke out, and a car slid around the drive, drawing up almost in the middle of them.

"How do you do," said the languid voice of Beth Willison, as she stepped out with her Alsatian on a silver lead. "So glad to find you at home. Mother wondered if you would all come over and dance to-morrow night, Mrs. Ivery. . . . Be quiet, Milord, you know perfectly well those little dogs are quite harmless."

The Alsatian put back his handsome ears. Beth let him pull her and leaned backwards, her smart silk coat flowing out in the correct Landseer manner. She was dressed as though for a London drawing-room, thought Mrs. Ivery,

resenting the reference to "little dogs," and her lips were *crimson*. Very much annoyed at this invasion of her cherished party, she introduced Perch to the newcomer.

"I believe we are to be neighbors," said Beth, viewing the young man through half-shut eyes, and speaking in a tone of doubt as though she had merely heard the rumor. "Perhaps Mrs. Ivery will bring you too then to-morrow night. It will be quite informal, of course. We have the biggest wireless in the South of England, you know, so we can usually get dance music . . . if not from London—then from Paris or Berlin . . . or one of those places."

Without giving Roger time to reply, she passed round the group, condescendingly shaking hands, until reaching Gillian, she grasped Milord by the collar and drew quickly away, crying:

"What's that! . . ."

Everybody looked round in bewilderment—Chinko barked and Micky ran forward, sniffing, to investigate. The next moment Joyce had swooped down upon her pet and dragged him out of the way of contamination, for another uninvited guest had arrived upon the scene, and good manners, already strained to breaking point, collapsed altogether.

"Chase him off at once," commanded Mrs. Ivery in horror, clasping Chinko in her arms. "Scat! . . . go away, you nasty creature."

The one-time dog of the house, battered and torn, and

covered with blood and dust, sat weakly in the center of this alien throng, one swollen paw in the air, and not in the least understanding these words were being addressed to him. The barking dogs had wakened him from an uneasy sleep, and he still had spirit to come out and do battle if that was what they meant. But the human voices he heard as he arrived among them were such as he had known of old and trusted, and so he sat down with confidence asking for succor.

He was a comical sight, and Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, Perch and even the Colonel laughed. The four dog-owners, holding back their darlings, were indignant, however, and Mrs. Ivery cried to Gillian:

"Send the wretched little mongrel away, my dear . . . no, no . . . no, what *are* you doing?"

Gillian, kneeling down by the little black dog, exclaimed in a tone of pity:

"He's hurt!"

"Gillian! You will be getting some dreadful disease. Are you mad, child? George, chase the beast out of the garden at once. We simply can't have these stray dogs from the village about the place," called Mrs. Ivery, and the Colonel, thus appealed to, hurried forward.

Gillian, however, had her arm round Jock by this time, and she faced them all appealingly.

"But he's hurt. We can't be cruel to him. How would you like it if he belonged to you?"

The one-time dog of the house sat weakly in the center of this alien throng.

"Now, now, my dear," said the Colonel soothingly, "we must send him home. You don't understand the risk of infection. Your aunt is perfectly right."

"I'll take him away then," declared the girl, rising and gathering the terrier very carefully in her arms. "He's certainly in no state to be chased out. . . . Are you all blind . . . the poor dog's half dead!"

With tears of rage and scorn in her eyes, she turned and hurried away through the shrubbery as fast as she could go. Jock, leaning against the warm comfort of her jumper, feebly wagged a grateful tail.

The group she had left released their dogs with a sigh.

"Oh dear, I am afraid poor Gillian is very impulsive," said Mrs. Ivery, shaking her head.

"Silly ass," remarked Joyce. "Wait till she owns a valuable dog."

"Milord, you had better sit in the car in case of germs," commanded Beth.

"She thinks we're brutes," was Lal's contribution. She alone looked guilty.

Roger Perch meanwhile gazed after the departing Gillian, almost inclined to fling politeness to the winds and follow her. Politeness won, however, chiefly because he thought he would probably get a somewhat stormy reception from the young lady with the arresting gray eyes. That was a girl, if he knew anything, who could speak her mind.

CHAPTER V

He is Recognized as a Dashing Blade and Established in Hospital

1

DOWN at the end of the garden, hidden from sight, Gillian crouched with the unwelcome guest on her knee, seeking some place to leave him while she went in search of food, and water to bathe his wounds. To abandon him was not to be thought of, though the whole neighborhood should rise against her, but it was clearly unsafe to keep him here. At last she got up and carried him out the gates, looking this way and that for inspiration. To the left a coppice ran from the Iverys' property to the gardens of Brindlea. It was fenced off from the road and a track ran through it, made for use in the days when this had been the home farm of the estate. Gillian remembered a small disused hut half-way through it, and decided that would be the best hiding place she was likely to find.

Very carefully she lifted her burden through the fence, climbed after him, and made off through the trees, telling

him all about it in the gentlest voice he had heard for months.

"In just a little while you shall have dinner, old boy, and a warm wash, and the softest bed I can find," she assured him. "Don't you worry."

Jock leaned his nose against her, perfectly aware that his luck was changed.

The hut was small and full of dust and litter, its rickety door hanging on one hinge. Gillian, gathering an armful of dry leaves and bracken, made a temporary bed for her charge, then laid him on it gently, begging him to believe she would return in no time. Having secured the door temporarily, she came back and laid her sports coat over the patient; then shut him in and ran home as fast as she could go. Skirting the shrubbery, she slipped in a side door and up to her own room, ransacking drawers in search of cloth for bandages. Finding nothing else, she tore up a thin summer frock and rolled in it a pot of ointment, a clothes brush and a soft travelling cushion. A woolen scarf, a piece of strong string and her hot-water bag, filled from the bathroom, were the next contributions to the store; then she crept down to the kitchen in search of food.

"Could you give me any scraps for a poor starving dog out in the road, Cook?" she begged. "In an old tin, if you have such a thing. I want to give him a drink."

Cook gathered some odds and ends of meat, and a handful of Micky's biscuits, good-naturedly; and found an old

enamelled pie-dish she could spare. Gillian, laden with her treasure, went back to the patient.

"Are you there, darling?" she called to him, pushing open the door.

The dog of the house barked in reply and their first love scene began.

2

Jock ate his only square meal in days with her arm about him, and having drunk some of the water set outside to cool, told her in the most eloquent language what he thought of her.

"You know, you're going to be a very handsome blade, I can see that," she assured him, soaking her rag in warm water and beginning to bathe his wounded head. The warmth soothed him, and he even allowed her to put the ointment on, but the paw was a much more serious matter, and although she was at length able to wash it clean, it was obvious the little dog was suffering badly. There was an abscess there, she thought, and it seemed useless to add to his misery by bandaging it at present. She began therefore to brush his coat a little, and Jock was so pleased with this that he quivered with joy and presently lay on his side to assist the operation.

"Mongrel, indeed!" said Gillian indignantly. "Why, you are an influential dog, if you have been wounded in

battle . . . a dog of personality, aren't you, old fellow? They must be blind."

Having removed the worst of the mud from his coat, she gave him another biscuit and proceeded to make his bed and tidy his room for the night. The cushion and scarf on a nest of leaves in the corner would make quite a luxurious couch for the invalid, and he should have a tin of water left beside him and the last of the scraps.

"You won't bark, will you?" she asked him anxiously. "Because we have to lie low at present."

Jock wagged his tail.

The light was growing dim in the coppice as Gillian took her string and began operations on the door. She meant to tie it up this time though she hoped devoutly no one would pass that way. She fancied this was a private track, but suppose Mr. Perch came home by it? Her first good impression of Roger had been turned to scorn because he had laughed at this battered warrior at her feet. Saving all the foxes in England didn't make up for that, she thought indignantly.

"I suppose we are trespassing on his old land too," she said to Jock, then laughed at his responsive face. "Darling, you are the most intelligent dog in the world."

She hated to leave him, but it must be done, and at last she had him curled in his corner, and his door shut for the night. She had completely forgotten that they would think her absence strange, and as she walked back to the house in

the gathering dusk she began to see the difficulties ahead of her. Somehow she must get food for him, and she could not continually ask Cook without arousing suspicion. To buy it in the village would be dangerous too, even if she had money, and she had none. The few French coins in her bag would be no use here.

Gillian, accustomed to housekeeping for her father, had found it strange, when her uncle arrived upon the scene and took all financial responsibilities out of her hands, but she had been too dazed by her loss at the time to protest. Colonel Ivery firmly believed that women did not understand money; it was one of the natural disabilities of their sex. He was not a parsimonious man, but his income was comparatively small and he managed it carefully, overseeing even the household expenses from time to time. His brother's estate was not yet settled; there would be little for Gillian, but it would provide pin-money for the child, and since she would live with them at Ferris, it would do well enough. It had not entered his head that meanwhile she was without a penny in her purse.

Gillian had been shy of mentioning the matter, for she was living on them already, a dependent, though to do them justice they had never put it like that. Until her father's affairs were free of the lawyer's hands, her uncle would be actually out of pocket by her, and this obligation troubled Gillian.

She would have to increase it, however, now she had her

patient to consider, and with a sinking heart she rehearsed the scene in which she would borrow a few shillings from her uncle at the earliest opportunity—to buy what? Stamps? . . . no, there were always stamps in the house. There was almost everything in the house, pins, needles, soap, medicine. A toothbrush then! One may reasonably be fussy about a toothbrush, though it was quite likely her aunt would keep even a stock of these, she thought.

They were all in the drawing-room as she went up to her room, and she undressed quickly and slipped into the bath. By the time the party was over and her aunt remembered and came to look for her, she was sitting in her dressing-gown, because it seemed too early to change for dinner, but hardly worth while to put on her frock again.

"My dear, whatever became of you? . . . You are not ill, Gillian?"

"No, Aunt Helen, but I got in rather a mess carrying the little dog away so I thought I had better have a bath as you were nervous of infection," said Gillian.

"Very sensible! One wouldn't wish to be unkind to any creature, of course, but these village mongrels are such dirty little tykes and we have to think of Chinko and Micky. Better get into your dinner frock, dear, and go down to the fire, or you may catch cold," said Mrs. Ivery kindly.

She was pleased with her party after all. Roger Perch had played three sets with Joyce, and really, he was charm-

ing . . . such good manners. He would be an acquisition to the neighborhood.

Mrs. Ivery had asked Beth Willison to drive Lal home (though it was an affectation for the girl to come in a car that short distance, and merely showing off). It had been less easy to dislodge Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, but when the Colonel carried Mr. Perch away to see his collection, she had gone at last. They had had the newcomer to themselves for a little while. Yes, it had been a good afternoon. With perfect tact she had got rid of her uninvited guests.

CHAPTER VI

His Rescuer Supports Him by Stealth

I

GILLIAN IVERY, early next morning, began to lead a double life. She was already dressed when the maid brought her tea, and she explained that she felt like a walk before breakfast because it was such a lovely day.

"Yes, miss, that's right," said the girl. "Give you an appetite like, but I'd wear strong shoes, if I was you. It's that wet underfoot."

As soon as the girl's steps died away, Gillian filled her hot-water bag in the bathroom, drank her tea and wrapped up the sugar and thin bread and butter for her patient. It was a very meager meal for him but better than nothing. What he really needed was a good large bone.

Coming downstairs she was greeted by Micky, eager to accompany her, but she could not have that, so she sought the housemaid's assistance.

"I don't like to take him without asking Miss Joyce, and

he is so disappointed. Could I have some biscuits to console him?"

The housemaid brought a handful and Micky retired to enjoy the feast, part of which, however, went into Gillian's pocket. She had entered upon a career of crime and was unrepentant.

The world outside was pale gold and beautiful, and she had an hour to spare for her task. She whistled as she went through the dewy garden, loving the cold air on her face, but approaching the patient's house she went softly. She wanted to take him by surprise.

All night she had kept waking from sleep to listen for his voice, but she had heard nothing, and now her heart began to beat with fear, for suppose this meant he had been discovered and chased away?

No, it was all right. The fastenings were in place.

"Darling," called a soft voice through the door.

"Wuff!" answered an excited gentleman behind it.

2

The birds were singing in the tree-tops, a noisy chorus, and Jock spoke to them about it in no uncertain manner as his housekeeper made his bed and tidied the room.

She did not interrupt him for a little while, for he would have to be still again very soon, and he couldn't always be

dumb. As he hopped weakly about among the leaves, sniffing the morning air, she saw his quality clearly for the first time, and wondered where he had come from. She had not found the name-plate on his collar, or even thought to look for it, but she was convinced he was no village dog.

"You're mine now, aren't you?" she said to him, as he came and sat at her feet. She produced the bread and butter and saw it disappear in a second, then a piece of sugar for a treat. The warm water and rags were waiting ready. Medical treatment began.

They had a walk together afterwards while she earnestly discussed the future with him.

"If you are very quiet and patient, sweetheart, and let me get you quite mended, and your old handsome self again, they might let me have you to live with me," she told him. "I can't promise, but I won't desert you, you may be sure. . . . If they won't," she added, stopping short at the end of another few yards, "we may have to elope. What do you think of that?"

Jock sat down and looked up at her, as much as to say he was ready for anything.

Colonel Ivery went up to town that morning, and Gillian, unable to ask him for money therefore, was in despair, thinking of a hungry black gentleman depending upon her for food. Joyce was busy altering a dance frock for the evening and claimed her cousin's help. Gillian, as she sat stitching busily until the luncheon gong rang, answered at

random when Joyce spoke to her, listening all the time for a voice of complaint from the hut.

During the meal she became a warm favorite with Micky by giving him offerings from her plate, and under cover of this indulgence managed to secure half the booty in her handkerchief. Even so, the situation was desperate, and at length she decided there was nothing left for it but to be ill so that she could dine in her room, and save a square meal for her protegé.

As soon as Joyce's frock was finished she slipped out to give him another brief run and a feed. Then she sought her aunt, said she had neuralgia and asked to be allowed to go to bed.

"You've forgotten the dance," Joyce exclaimed.

"Well, dear, poor Gillian may not feel quite ready for gaieties yet." protested her mother gently. "Of course you must go to bed, child, and I will bring you some medicine. I have an excellent remedy, though rest will do you more good, perhaps. After all, you have been through a great strain."

Gillian, not without qualms of guilt, went off to bed, but Joyce was apparently dissatisfied, and by-and-by she knocked at Gillian's door and went in to view the invalid.

"Better come," she advised . . . "Look here, are you sure you don't want to? . . . Because that's all rot about strain. You're as ready for gaieties as I am . . . I mean,"

explained Joyce in gruff embarrassment, "you are not to get it into your head that we don't want you to go."

Gillian sat up and protested, scarlet with surprise and rather touched.

"Of course I don't think that. Why, you have all been perfect to me, and I'll be as gay as you like when this neuralgia has gone," she cried impulsively.

"Oh, all right then—as long as you're sure," said Joyce, relieved.

"Micky can keep you company, if you like."

She lifted the spaniel on to her cousin's feet and departed abruptly. Joyce was not good at expressing herself, and from her inability to do so, often seemed ungracious, but she had her own ideas of decency, and pushing another girl into the background was not one of them.

Gillian enjoyed Micky's company, since having a spurious headache she could not read to pass the time. She told him about the hut in the coppice, stroking his silken floppy ears in the way he loved, and when her dinner tray came up fed him on bread soaked in gravy with many apologies for the libel she proposed to spread about him. Lamb cutlets, green peas and new potatoes! Gillian dined on the vegetables, but the cutlets, wrapped in paper, went into her drawer.

"I have a visitor and we've eaten everything, bones and all," she said when the housemaid came to clear away.

The girl called Micky a spoilt rascal.

"You're rare set on dogs, miss, like Miss Joyce and the mistress. You did ought to have one of your own," she said, as she went off smiling.

"I have," whispered Gillian in Micky's ear.

3

Roger Perch was amused at Miss Willison's "informal" dance, for the arrangements were elaborate and the girl herself wore a dress more suitable for a presentation at Court. Father, fussing over his ornate radio, and mother, beaming upon everyone, were more to Roger's taste. They were a kind old couple who had worked hard and made money, and their son Peter, a lad with a twinkle in his eye, was carrying on the tradition in his father's old firm. Beth alone of the family was superior. Wealth coming rather suddenly had turned her head and she tried hard to give the impression that she had never known anything else.

Perch looked in vain for one familiar face among the guests and, as he partnered his young hostess in the first dance, he remarked:

"Colonel and Mrs. Ivery seem to have left their younger daughter at home."

"You mean the other girl you saw yesterday?" responded a languid voice. "She's no daughter . . . merely a poor relation, I believe. I hardly know her."

"Really? How interesting! I was a poor relation myself not so very long ago," said Roger without a smile.

"Boring for you!"

"Not a bit . . . but then, of course, I am still poor, though not a relation," continued the young man conversationally, and smiled to himself as he saw his partner suppress a yawn. She thought this discussion of poverty vulgar, he was sure, and the idea charmed him. For the remainder of the dance he pursued it indefatigably and had his reward. Miss Willison's programme was full when he approached her again.

She had made a false move in her contemptuous reference to Gillian, but she was too complacent to discover it, and thought she had been rather clever. To treat him with indifference and keep him at a distance, she firmly believed, was the way to make any man her slave. Roger Perch was ready to give her every chance to do both.

He was faintly concerned about the stormy-eyed and absent poor relation now. If they had left her behind on purpose it was a damned shame.

Lal Chancellor eased his mind to some extent, for she mentioned Gillian's absence.

"Poor kid's gone to bed with a headache," she explained.

"She was invited then?" inquired Roger. "I gathered from Miss Willison she was too poor."

"She's a dashed sight richer than I am anyway," said Lal with a cheerful grin. "I've never heard Gillian was

poor . . . a bit rummy in some ways, having been brought up abroad."

"Hullo! Another foreigner about the place. Don't forget I'm one myself."

"Oh, sorry . . . but what do you mean by 'she said Gillian was too poor?' " inquired Lal, suddenly bristling with suspicion.

Roger, rather liking the vicar's daughter, inquired in a confidential voice:

"Is she a friend of yours?"

"No," said Lal. "Her young brother is and he hates the sight of her."

"Nice fellow, evidently?"

"You bet."

"Then I'll forget my manners and imitate our hostess, but don't you give me away," Roger drawled in the manner of Miss Willison. " 'She's not a daughter of the Iverys, but a poor relation, I believe. I hardly know her.'

"Naturally I thought of our old friend Cinderella at once," he concluded.

"The cat! Don't you believe it, Roger-Podger—oh, I'm awfully sorry, that's my private pet name for you," cried Lal, "but it's rather early for it yet, I suppose."

"Early? Certainly not. Why, I've known you for twenty-four hours . . . almost since you were in the cradle, one might say. So you don't agree with the Cinderella theory?"

"No, I don't, and you needn't either. Why, Joyce simply

begged Gillian to come, but she *had* a headache, and Mrs. Ivery wouldn't urge it because she lost her father only a month ago. You know what the elders are. They always think you ought to have a jolly good mourn," said Lal. "Joyce and I agree it would have done her far more good to come and dance it off."

Roger laughed and he and Miss Chancellor parted excellent friends.

All unwittingly Miss Willison had done Gillian and her dusky Scot a service, for during the evening Lal found an opportunity to repeat the poor relation episode to Joyce, and Joyce, full of indignation, repeated it to her parents going home.

Next morning when Gillian, very red and stammering, asked her uncle to lend her a few shillings, Beth's ill-natured remark about her had its effect. He was horrified that he had not realized her penniless condition and, taking her indoors, gave her five pounds.

"Bless my soul, child, why didn't you tell me weeks ago? We have treated you shabbily. It never entered my head you were without funds," he said, greatly distressed.

"Oh, you haven't treated me shabbily," exclaimed Gillian. "I have been spoiled to death and I know father's affairs aren't settled and I must be an expense to you. I could do with far less than this, really."

"No, no, you must have money in your purse, my dear," declared her uncle, "and when that is spent, let me know.

As for expense, your aunt and I are delighted to have another daughter, and this is your home."

Gillian went off gratefully, clasping her wealth. This would support a battered warrior for ages, and the only difficulty before her now was to get him regular supplies from Ferris Royale.

CHAPTER VII

He Finds His Landlord a Decent Fellow

I

ONE morning Roger Perch found an unexpected gate leading into a small coppice from the Brindlea gardens, and went through it to investigate. He was glad that his inheritance had caught him unawares, instead of having come to him after long familiarity, for there was enough of the boy in him at twenty-eight to be thrilled by every new discovery about it. His predecessor, embittered by the loss of his sons, had lived a retired life, caring little for what remained of his ancestral acres, but Roger, with practical experience behind him, saw new possibilities at every turn and was charmed by the prospect of waking Brindlea to life again. Hard work suited him and he loved a fight. By spring he meant to have several idle acres planted with fruit trees, the gardens in trim, and two more glass-houses for experimental purposes. Since Burrows had doggedly done his best with no encouragement and insufficient help, he raised his wages and told him to engage a couple of capable men of his own choice. Burrows therefore was committed to the innovations and saw him-

self a man of authority. The new owner had won an obstinate and useful ally.

Roger strolled through the little coppice, viewing the timber which needed thinning here and there. Some of the old trees were dead and must come down. It was a peaceful spot and he whistled as he walked through the fallen leaves to a blackbird singing overhead.

Both whistle and footsteps reached a certain dusky gentleman, who by now considered himself the lord of this particular corner of the world, and he barked indignantly.

Perch swung round in surprise and saw Jock's castle for the first time.

The door was closed and firmly tied from the outside with string, but there could be no doubt that the owner was in residence. He spoke very sharply to this trespasser who had the insolence to approach.

The trespasser peered through a crack, and seeing nothing but darkness, took out his knife, cut the string, and pulled the door ajar.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he said.

On the threshold, barking furiously, was a long, black, stocky body on three short legs, the fourth being held aloft, bound in a fresh white muslin bandage.

"Lie down, sir," said Perch in a tone of authority.

The dog of the house stood his ground and went on barking. He had never heard such insolence. What was the world coming to?

Roger, amused, held out a hand to soothe him, and he ceased barking to growl. When the hand was not removed he looked at it in astonishment with his head on one side and, being still rather weak, sat down. Roger dropped on one knee. Owner and tenant looked each other in the eye.

Recognition dawned in the former's glance. The blood and grime had been brushed from the dusky gentleman's coat by now; the cut on his head was healing well, he looked no longer a wreck but a dog of consequence, but his expressive countenance remained. Though he gazed at his visitor with reserve, he was willing to be civil if the fellow deserved civility. Let him explain himself.

The hand came nearer. Jock smelt it and put out a red tongue. It stroked his head carefully and the place under his chin, so that he raised his nose and closed his eyes in a smile. Then gently it touched his sides, in a long, massaging motion. The patient began to wave his tail.

"Like it?" inquired the visitor conversationally. "Now let's look at this leg of yours."

A soft growl began as he touched the bandage, but it was merely a warning and not a reproach. This man understood what he was doing. His touch and his voice told Jock all he wanted to know.

The little chap's leg was not broken, Perch found, but the bandage, otherwise fresh as paint, had a dark stain over the swollen paw. Congratulating the patient on his doctor, the visitor got up to examine the sick room. Everything was

neat and in order. The cushion bed was covered with a gay woolen scarf, and in a cardboard box lay rolls of muslin, needle and cotton and a pot of ointment. A clothes-brush, recently washed, stood on end to dry against a tin containing dog-biscuits, and a dish of clean water and another in which were the remains of a meal, completed the furniture.

"She does you well, Scot, old chap. Seems a thorough sort of maiden," he remarked to his host.

The latter cocked his ears and limped to the door suggestively. It was dull shut in the house so much, he seemed to say. What about a breath of fresh air?

Perch, making sure that the coppice was empty, said: "Carry on then." He had no desire to be caught by a vengeful goddess with lightning in her glance, but a run would do the patient good, and she no doubt was tending him by stealth and therefore against a hundred difficulties.

He was astonished at the change she had effected already and now deeply interested in the whole situation. An amazing girl! He had thought so from the first.

He let the terrier nose about for a long blissful hour, and then left him with a biscuit and good will on both sides, fastening the door carefully behind him.

This was all very well, but string was no protection against curious visitors, he thought. Any village lad passing by might carry the dog away, and she would be left lamenting.

This thought disturbed him so much that he decided

strangers must be kept out of the coppice and, seeking Burrows, told him to put a board up fronting the road: "Trespassers will be Prosecuted."

"Well, sir, just as you say, but I don't altogether 'old with such notices myself. Attractin' attention to the place, if you know what I mean. Tell a body 'e can't 'ave something, and 'e wants it immediate. That's 'uman nature."

"By Jove, Burrows, there's something in that. Better not, you think?"

"If it was me, I wouldn't, because why? Nobody comes through that coppice. Nothing to be got by it, don't you see."

"Oh, good. Then we had better leave well alone."

Roger, lighting his pipe, strolled away, and having succeeded in losing Burrows, purloined two iron staples, a hammer and a new padlock with a couple of keys attached, from the tool shed. Later in the day he paid another visit to his dusky tenant, and while Jock, much elated at this extra freedom, strolled about, he fixed the staples and dropped the padlock and one key negligently inside the door. The other key he put in his pocket, and before he left, he fastened the string as before.

He felt pleased at his own cunning, for the staples were rusty and looked as though they had been there for years. He hoped she would imagine she had overlooked them, and that the dog had unearthed the padlock from the earthen

floor. He had rubbed it in the damp ground outside in order to bolster this illusion.

2

Up to a point his scheme succeeded. Gillian, stealing out to settle her patient for the night, did not see the staples, for she was in a hurry, and when she discovered the padlock she told Jock he was a wonder and kissed his ear as a reward. Finding a key attached to the padlock was an unbelievable piece of luck, and she pointed out to him that fate was evidently on their side.

The dog of the house, who had been aware of this for some days, wagged his tail and said nothing, like a tactful fellow.

Even when she went to see how she could use the padlock, and found the staples which she had never noticed before, it did not enter her head that the fate in question had a name and address. Indeed, such a thing would have seemed incredible. Gillian knew no good fairies in that neighborhood, for it will be remembered that the man who stole the fox and almost acquired this position in her eyes, had fallen from his high estate by laughing at a warrior wounded in battle. Since then, when she'd thought of him at all, it had been with scorn.

Her relief at having a lock on the patient's door would have been short-lived had she known of the second key

to it, but Jock reaped the benefit, for he now had two visiting physicians who came at different hours and never without something to cheer the inner man. True, one was a deity, and the other merely an acquaintance, but he was a civil acquaintance and quite to be trusted. Jock bore with him.

Gillian marveled at the fine polish coming out on her black gentleman's coat, and supposed it was a sign of returning health. Gradually the swelling on his foot was being reduced by the daily applications of hot water, and altogether the patient was doing well.

Like some other philanthropists, Roger Perch, having done a good deed, was not content to leave it at that. He wanted to know how it had been received.

He called at the Iverys' therefore on a pretense of wanting some advice from the Colonel, and was hospitably kept to tea. Chinko, waving a plumey tail, sauntered about the drawing-room, his golden trousers brushing the carpet; Joyce, clutching Gillian as though afraid she would escape, sat beside her on the chesterfield, with Micky at their feet.

"Where is *your* dog?" asked Roger, looking at Gillian with an innocent face.

"Micky's half hers," said Joyce, defensively, at once.

Gillian smiled at Joyce and gave her half-dog a piece of bread and butter. Roger, watching the delicate contour of her face, found himself treated with inattention.

He was indignant about this because he was sure it was

not assumed, and he went home determined to make a calm and indifferent young woman aware of his existence. She had invaded his private property and stolen a house for her dog, and yet she hardly knew he was there. It was cool, to say the least of it.

He pondered the matter all that evening, and at last spent some time at his desk. Next morning when Gillian called at the hut all was as usual, but by afternoon a change startled her. Fresh straw strewed the ground before the door, on which a large ornate placard had been pasted.

HOSPITAL

NO
HEAVY TRAFFIC
OR
CAT-CALLS
ALLOWED

BY ORDER

Gillian shouted with laughter, and Jock raised his voice from within as though he too saw the joke, at which she became grave again, for who could have done this?

With shaking fingers she unlocked the door and caught the dark gentleman in her arms, gazing around the hut for any sign of an alien hand. Everything was in place, however, and she sighed with relief, scorning her own fears.

Of course! The door had been locked so all was well. Somebody had gone by, no doubt, and the darling had barked. So whoever it was had decided to be funny.

She looked at the notice again and frowned, for why Hospital? How could anyone know what dog it was in there? You can't get through a locked door when somebody else has the key.

Somebody had found out then, seen her coming here perhaps, but who?

Joyce? No, she was too downright to say nothing and play a trick like this. The servants were out of the question too. Lal might have done it for a joke, but she would hardly have brought all this straw from the vicarage. Gillian gazed at the straw suspiciously, walked to the end of it, and saw some odd strands further on, leading to Brindlea.

Then it was Mr. Perch!

A smile dawned, but she suppressed it firmly, for she was not at all sure she could trust him—that rescuer of foxes. All very well for him to be funny, but suppose he gave her away? Gillian, looking after her three-legged dog, felt her heart turn over, knowing that to lose him now would be beyond bearing. The past week of scheming and dissimulation and service had bound them together, and she was convinced he was the most brilliantly intelligent and the most beautiful dog in the world.

There might come a time, as soon as he was perfectly strong and healed, when she could sound her uncle and

aunt about the possibility of adding a Scottish terrier to the family circle and, if they agreed, tell them all; but to have the tale of her misdeeds carried to them from outside, however humorously, was a danger she could not face.

In the hollow trunk of an old tree she had hidden his parcel of bones, bought at Ferris Royale, and now she hurried to it to see that his larder was safe, Jock hopping after her, full of anticipation.

"All right, darling, he hasn't stolen your dinner, that's lucky."

She had had difficulty in getting to Ferris Royale alone, for Joyce always offered to accompany her now when she said she was going anywhere; and every time visitors came to the house she rushed away to bring her cousin in, and made a fuss of her in her gruff way. Gillian was both touched and puzzled by this behavior, and sometimes wondered guiltily whether her spurious attentions to Micky were responsible.

At last she had made the journey to Ferris Royale by stealth, almost running, and had demanded of the butcher as many dog-bones as she could carry. He must have thought she owned a pack of hounds, and he had urged her to let him send the bones, evidently shocked for any young lady to be seen with such an unseemly burden.

It had been a heavy burden too, and every time, going back, when anyone approached, she had dropped it under a bush, and pretended to be studying the botany of the

plants along the roadside. No criminal trying to conceal the evidence of his guilt could have behaved with greater secrecy.

It was a relief therefore to find the larder safe, but she saw she would have to keep her eye on that Mr. Perch—

a difficult feat but necessary. She even gave Jock a long run, right up to Brindlea, so that she might peer through the hedge in search of its scoundrelly owner; but all she could see was Mrs. Bryce-Spencer stooping over one of the garden beds, and at this she gathered her dog under her arm and ran for her life.

The hut could not be seen from Brindlea luckily, but

Gillian did not feel safe until she had her patient inside it. What was that woman doing in Mr. Perch's garden? It seemed very odd, but perhaps she had worried permission out of him to let her help herself. Gillian decided it was no business of hers if he liked to give Mrs. Bryce-Spencer the run of the place, and consoled herself with the reflection that the coppice at least contained nothing of use to "the poor."

CHAPTER VIII

He Acquires an Art Gallery

1

JOYCE and Gillian went to tea with Lal Chancellor that afternoon, and the vicar, coming in rather late from fishing, brought Roger Perch with him.

This time, the young man was charmed to notice, the stormy-eyed Miss Ivery was thoroughly aware of his existence, for whenever he looked her way, which was often, she was watching him with an anxious and suspicious air.

It was impossible, with his hostess fussing about him, and the three girls sitting together at the other end of the room, to get a word with her alone, and he was sorry for that, unconscious of the fact that on this occasion the sentiment was mutual. Gillian Ivery wanted a word with that Mr. Perch very badly indeed.

She sat between Joyce and Lal, like a pale flower, he thought—a wild flower with two bright garden blooms. Joyce resembled one of her mother's sturdy dahlias, she would flourish in the windy weather; Lal, with her short, corn-colored hair and round face, was a rose, one of the creamy kind that peer in your window cheekily, then sway

out of reach; but the girl who stole huts was a graceful and very pale bluebell from the heart of a wood. Through Roger's musings he vaguely heard the sonorous tones of Mr. Chancellor preaching to the assembled flock.

"—so as I say, the fellow will be no loss to the community if they shut him up, for the poor woman and her children go in terror of their lives. It is a curious thing that your habitual poacher is often quite a decent man in his family life, and one feels a certain sympathy when he is apprehended. Strawn, however, deserves no mercy, and I trust it is not un-Christian to hope the Bench will be severe. . . . You have had no trouble of the kind at Brindlea, Perch, I hope?"

"Have I anything to poach?" asked Roger. "I'm a tyro in these matters yet, but my man Burrows is wide awake and I've heard nothing. . . . Certainly a fellow has been sleeping in an empty hut on the place . . . dark-complexioned chap."

He stole a surreptitious glance at Gillian Ivery, and added with an innocent air: "Seems to be a storm brewing. I fancy I saw lightning."

"Surely not, my dear fellow . . . the flash from a passing car, perhaps; but this is disturbing. One may have to bear with the depredations of our own poor villagers, but I don't like to think of vagrants in the neighborhood. You sent him packing, of course?"

"Oh well, I daresay he'll take himself off. Quite harm-

less, I fancy. He certainly showed fight at first, but I let him see that wouldn't do," said Roger, gazing with apparent absence of mind across the room at the three girls.

Mrs. Chancellor, immediately awake to the direction of his glance, called her daughter reproachfully.

"Lal, you are being very inhospitable. Why are you girls hidden away over there? Go and bring your snapshots of the dogs. I am sure Mr. Perch would like to see them."

Mrs. Chancellor was one of those anxious hostesses who think guests must be forcibly entertained, and showing them pictures was her chief resource, unless they belonged to her own sex, when she could show them knitting patterns instead. She summoned Joyce for this purpose and the group broke up. The vicar went to the window in search of a possible storm, and Gillian found herself within speaking distance of Roger Perch.

"If you give me away I'll tell them you stole the fox," she whispered fiercely.

"Great heavens! So you have second sight? But this is blackmail, and in a vicarage drawing-room too! I'm surprised at you."

"I mean it."

"What a determined criminal you are! First trespass, then burglary—opening and entering I believe is the correct phrase—and now this. You'll come to a sticky end."

"Oh dear, is something sticky?" cried Mrs. Chancellor over Joyce's head.

"No—I was just saying to Miss Ivery I am sure poachers and trespassers all come to a sticky end," explained Roger. "I don't want to make these girls nervous with my tale of the fellow in the hut; so I think I'd better see them safely home when they are ready to go."

"Needn't bother," said Joyce. "We are not a pair of frightened rabbits."

"Yes, Mr. Perch, I should feel easier in my mind," declared Mrs. Chancellor, "and do make sure that this tramp leaves the district, or we may all be murdered in our beds."

"No fear of that, I am sure," said Roger. "He hadn't the cut of a villain, poor chap. Was lame too. I advised him to take a spell in hospital. He's probably there by now."

2

Roger took the two girls home, but found conversation difficult. Joyce clutched Gillian's arm, answering in abrupt monosyllables, and Gillian hardly spoke.

Leaving them at their own door, he took with him a picture of a worried, pale face and two suspicious gray eyes, and he was sorry he had had no opportunity to reassure their owner. The poor child, he remembered, was a stranger among these people, kind enough though they might be, alone and dependent, not a pleasant position at any time. He felt that he had been a brute to frighten her, and was determined somehow to put the matter right.

Over his dinner he composed a note to leave under the hut door next morning, but this seemed too tame for a piquant situation, and later he changed his mind, and spent a busy evening with cardboard, string, pen and ink. He was so pleased with the result that he paid the dusky gentleman a visit soon after dawn. The invalid got wet pattering among the dewy leaves and he had to be rubbed down with his landlord's handkerchief.

"If you have a relapse, Scot, old fellow, I shall hear some pretty plain language from that nurse of yours. You put in a word for me, there's a good chap," said Roger, covering the reluctant invalid with the end of the scarf and tucking him in.

He had just turned the key in the lock when the sound of hurrying footsteps reached him and, locating their direction, he slipped noiselessly out of sight to the back of the hut, as Gillian reached her patient's door.

"Are you there, darling?" he heard her call anxiously.

"Wuff, wuff," answered the gentleman with enthusiasm.

Roger, his eye to a crack, saw the door burst open, and heard the lovers' greeting, followed by a breathless laugh.

"The idiot!" cried Gillian, lifting her patient up to see. "Isn't he childish, that uncle of yours, but how on earth did he get in?"

Gillian might be anxious, but the "idiot's" efforts were too much for her gravity, and her chuckles reached a delighted perpetrator.

The dark gentleman's house had been hung with cardboard pictures, all genuine originals signed by the artist. The drawing might be odd, but this, perhaps, was the modern touch. Beside the patient's bed was a medical chart, showing the progress of his malady from zero to an impossible pinnacle; above it was an illuminated text "GOD BLESS OUR HOME," with the hut in the foreground a little awry and the master of it, recognizable only by two pointed ears, seated at the open door.

The next picture was entitled *Scotland Forever*, and showed the dog of the house in kilts, playing the bagpipes to a cowed assembly of four—Micky, Chinko, Wog and Milord, all basely libelled. An election poster invited the beholder to *Vote for Perch and Pay No Rent*; the candidate's portrait pictured him with a halo and wings and his titles followed:

Founder and first President of the Anti-Cat League.

Champion of the Royal Society for the Protection of Orphan Pups.

Visiting Physician, Scot's Hospital, Ferris Minor.

Author of "Tell-no-Tales," "Fox of Ferris," and "The Ivory Angel."

Gold Medallist, College of Dog Fanciers (Terrier Division).

The fourth masterpiece was labelled:

Lullaby—en Doggerelle

Sleep well, oh, master of the house,
And dream of bones all night.
If footsteps press the dewy grass,
Sleep on, my lad, and let them pass.
Morn, when it brings a certain lass
Will guide your bark aright.

A thumbnail sketch showed the sleeping master of the house, his black pillowed head emerging from the bedclothes, and a medicine bottle and glass on a table beside him.

Gillian, convulsed by this effort, said to her dog as she poured the hot water out and began to unwind his bandage:

"Isn't he a super-idiot? I'd like to know how he got in, though."

"Through the keyhole," replied a voice from nowhere.

"Where are you?" she demanded indignantly, jumping to her feet and leaving the patient trailing a yard of muslin. "Come out of hiding at once."

"I thought anyone with second sight would *know* I came through the keyhole," he argued meekly, appearing before her. "Besides, an uncle may visit his nephew in hos-

pital. It's one of the laws of the country. And you said I was his uncle. You must be right."

"A precious wicked uncle then," she returned.

"Wrong! I didn't lose the babe in the wood. Contrary to precedent, the deed was done in this case by his wicked aunt."

"That's all very well, but it doesn't explain how you got through a locked door." Gillian seized the patient again and continued operations, but the severity of her glance did not abate.

"Landlord's privilege," he explained. "I always like to keep an eye on my tenants, especially when their rent is overdue."

"I didn't know the hut belonged to you," pleaded Gillian, "and I couldn't leave him to die." Her face was suddenly troubled, but in a moment it cleared again. "I'm perfectly willing to pay for the hut till he's well, if you'll promise not to give me away."

"My charges for that," said Roger in a business-like manner, "will be a couple of smiles when we meet. Must keep up the rent, you know, in these hard times. . . . Paid on the nail. Thanks! Shall I send the receipt on by post? . . . As for leaving my friend Scot to die, you just let me catch you at it. Hospitals on my estate are strictly inspected, I can tell you, and that's another reason for my visits to the patient. He was a serious case and needed a second opinion."

"What did you prescribe? . . . Poetry?"

"Certainly. Brighter surroundings and a daily walk with his landlord, didn't I, Scot, old man?"

"Have you really been taking him for a run?" asked the girl in a grateful voice.

"Not out of the hospital grounds, I assure you, but it's hard on the little chap to be shut up, and I guessed you couldn't often get away. As Visiting Physician and Chairman of the Royal Society for the Protection of Orphan Pups, you may trust me, even if as a landlord I seem a trifle harsh."

Gillian's smile dawned again, perhaps with a view to paying up arrears of rent. The bathing of the wound was presently completed, and she lifted the patient up for the visiting physician to view its progress. Roger felt his pulse and looked at his tongue and pronounced him out of danger.

"Appetite good?"

"Yes, rather, and he's longing for his breakfast, poor darling, but first he must have a new bandage. He's a marvelous dog really and you see if I can get him back into first-class condition, they might let me keep him at home."

Her voice grew anxious and she searched his face as though for confirmation of this hope. "It was only because they were afraid of infection for Micky and Chinko. . . . Of course, it was quite natural. . . . So you see they

simply mustn't find out till he's perfectly well. . . ." she said urgently.

"You trust me. He has a double guard now. Let me give him a run round for you occasionally and hasten the cure."

"Thanks awfully, then I'd better show you where the larder is in case he seems hungry," said Gillian. "Come along, my black rascal, and have your breakfast."

The rascal hopped off in the direction of the larder the instant he was released, a morning habit, but to the two who followed him yet another sign of his brilliant gifts.

"By Jove, we'll have to be careful what we say before that dog," said Roger. "The little beggar understands every word."

"Yes, I know. I used to lie awake at night at first," confessed Gillian, "because I was so afraid he would howl or bark, and he never made a sound. You can't wonder I think him remarkable."

Roger thought he was not the only remarkable being present, but felt it might be rather early to say it yet, even for the fun of seeing the lightning flash in a pair of gray eyes. The extent of the larder staggered him, and he pointed out that buying a complete bullock for the dog was carrying enthusiasm too far.

She told him about her excursion to Ferris Royale and the walk back, hiding the bones at intervals.

"You'll be had up for murdering some person or persons unknown if you try that sort of thing," exclaimed Roger,

"and bring scandal on a neighborhood of innocent people. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer and Miss Beth Willison would never hold up their heads again; rich and poor, we should all be in it for harboring such a villain among us. Seriously though, as visiting physician to this hospital, I can't have the staff parading about like any bone-merchant. Next time I'll tell my cook to order in a stock."

"But won't she think it funny when you haven't any dogs at Brindlea?" asked Gillian, torn between gratitude and doubt.

"Yes, but that's all right. I like her to think me funny. It is a good landlord's duty to provide entertainment for his staff. If necessary I'll explain I'm going to plant bones and grow cows."

The sound of a distant gong interrupted this fooling, and Gillian, catching up her dog, exclaimed in dismay:

"That's breakfast and I shall be late, and he hasn't even had a drink, poor darling."

"You leave the drinks to me," said Roger, lifting the patient out of her arms, "and the locking up too. Come on, Scot. We can't keep a lady from her breakfast."

The Scottish gentleman looked after his love with wistful eyes, then regarded the visiting physician with some disfavor. However, the man proved a fair housekeeper, so he decided to let the incident pass, especially as he was allowed an extra run while the fellow did something to the front door.

He called again later in the morning too, and when his lady managed to slip out again to the hut in the woods she found a new inscription on the door.

MR. SCOT'S HOSPITAL

Street Organs & Pedlers Prohibited.

Tradesmen's Entrance at Brindlea.

Inside there was a rug, a bottle of brilliantine, a dog-brush, an improvised seat and a card of rules and regulations:

The staff must not sit on the bare floor.
The operating table may be carried out of doors weather permitting.
The officiating surgeon will avoid pneumonia by sitting on the rug.
The brilliantine is for the patient's outer and not inner man.
The clothes-brush is now released from service.
Any memos for the visiting physician should be written on the pad behind the door.

Gillian, her eyes alight with laughter, looked behind the door forthwith, and finding pad and pencil hanging from a nail, wrote:

"The Visiting Physician is requested not to pamper the staff."

She went out and carefully walked round the hut to see that he was not lurking there, and even looked up into the nearest trees, before saying to the gentleman trotting happily beside her:

"Isn't he a thorough child? . . . But I don't mind his coming to play with you, sweetheart. It will be nice for you."

Jock Scot, Esquire, smiled at her voice, then ran an imaginary rabbit to earth with a growl of joy. This was the life for him—a house of his own in a forest and a couple of slaves at his beck and call. What more could anyone ask?

CHAPTER IX

Burglars Arrive at his Door, but Are Repulsed

1

ONE afternoon two burglars tried to break into Jock's house in the forest, and much to his own regret he was unable to get out and do battle with the villains.

Wog was the ringleader of the affair. He had been given to Lal by Peter Willison, an ingenious lad, who saw in the gift an excellent excuse for spending much of his spare time in the neighborhood of the vicarage.

"If you have any trouble with the pup, just send for me," said Peter.

The trouble arrived with lightning speed, of course. Wog, true to tradition, reduced the vicar's favorite slippers to a pulp, devoured half a hat and left muddy footprints on every bed in turn. Turned indignantly out of the house by Mrs. Chancellor, he seemed to think the garden was in a bad way, and proceeded to dig up some of her choicer plants. Peter was summoned forthwith.

"Better let me train him for you a bit," he suggested

kindly. "I'll run over and give him a run every morning before breakfast and on Saturday afternoons we can take him into the woods. Come along, Wog, my boy, you need a man's firm hand. Can't have you growing up an imbecile."

Mrs. Chancellor thought this most kind of Peter, and thereafter the education of Wog proceeded apace. Lal and Peter enjoyed it, and their tuition did not stop short of domestic decorum at home and good sportsmanship abroad. Wog was also intructed in such decorative arts as the opening of doors and gates and took to the latter with such zest that his tutors were delighted with him, quite overlooking the fact that it might prove a dubious accomplishment for a young and naturally frivolous dog.

On the afternoon in question Lal took Wog to the Iverys', and laughed and praised him when he put his paw on the latch and pushed the gate open for her like any cavalier.

"But it will be a harder job going out," she warned him. "Come along and try it now. Open, boy."

Wog pushed the latch obediently, but, since the gate opened inwards, he could not move it. He sat down looking disconsolate, and then, recalling his lessons, lay on his side and shoved a woolly paw underneath. Lal loosened the latch again as a reward for this intelligence, and at once the gate yielded and Wog pulled it open in triumph.

Lal left the latch up to see if he would repeat the per-

formance going home, and promising him sugar for tea, led the way to the house.

The girls were on the tennis court, and Micky, charmed to see a friend, was soon careering round the garden with the lively Wog. In due time they reached the gate, and the airedale, remembering his recent triumphs, pulled it open, barking with joy. The next moment, followed by the admiring Micky, he had bounced into the road, close to the little coppice, surely a rare and rabbity hunting-ground for any sporting dog.

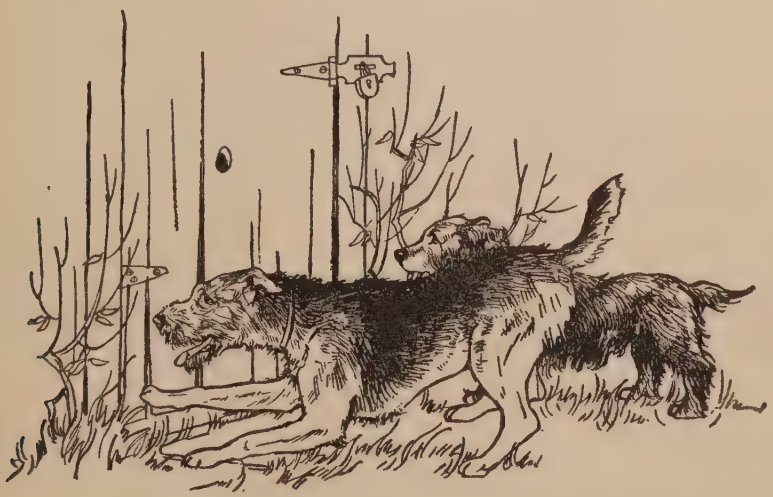
They went in to investigate, found no rabbits certainly, but enjoyed themselves none the less, Wog tearing ahead with the utmost abandon and barking at the birds. Suddenly an alien voice replied to him and he stood still in surprise. Micky ran up and gave tongue in his friend's defense and the little coppice echoed to the din.

Roger Perch, coming to visit his tenant, heard the uproar and ran for the hut, suspecting human trespassers. What he found was a brown curly body lying flat before the door, while one paddy paw endeavored by turns to push or pull it open and the owner growled excitedly. Micky, circling round, encouraged these efforts at the top of his voice, and the dark gentleman within stormed at the would-be burglars.

Roger was tempted to let him out but thought better of it, afraid that Lal and Joyce might appear in pursuit of their dogs. It was a pity, for the little Scot would have been

equal to the visitors, he was convinced, lame though he might be. The valiant and peremptory voice from inside, spoke of a warlike spirit. The dark gentleman would defend his home.

Roger lifted the astonished pup and set him on his feet, then called Micky to order and said a word of comfort to



the master of the house. Seizing a stick, he marshalled the burglars firmly off . . . a doleful progress. Micky, quite old enough to know he had broken the law by going out, drooped disconsolately. Wog on the other hand had a clear conscience and seemed greatly puzzled. He had only done what he had been taught to do and he hadn't eaten slippers or dug up anybody's garden for a month. No doubt some

dim perception of these facts led him to the conclusion that the man with the stick was having a game after all; so he jumped towards it eagerly, offering to carry it for him.

The man repulsed him so sternly, however, that he also lost his zest, and it was a thoroughly guilty looking pair of miscreants whom Roger shepherded through the coppice.

Gillian meanwhile had heard the distant barking and, alarmed for her dark gentleman, had run off through the shrubbery, ostensibly to look for a lost ball. Joyce and Lal, deep in a set of singles, hardly noticed her absence, and she had found a gap in the hedge and was peering through it with anxious eyes, when Roger and his prisoners came into view. She ventured a low whistle and he heard it. In two minutes he was on the other side of the hedge.

"These scoundrels went to visit the patient but I thought I 'd better bring them home before their infuriated parents came in search of them," he said. "Shall I hand them over?"

"Oh, please. I heard the noise and I was dreadfully worried."

Gillian received first one armful of culprit and then another, and setting them down, looked at their guilty faces.

"What did you do to my Mr. Scot?" she asked them sternly.

Micky gazed at her with pleading eyes; Wog wagged as much tail as he possessed. Roger smiled at the group.

"Don't you fret about the old Scot. He could eat a pair

Gillian received first one armful of culprit, then another.

that size," he said. "As for his language . . . you should have heard it."

A loud hail from the tennis court interrupted, and Gillian, followed by the two dogs, fled with a hasty farewell.

"All right," she said to them as she ran. "I won't tell this time, but don't let it occur again."

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, passing along the road below the coppice and glancing in, had been in time to see Roger lift Micky over the hedge. It naturally occurred to her that Joyce was on the other side, had probably just climbed through, and she turned the incident over in her mind.

Joyce and young Perch must be very friendly then, and it would be well to keep in with Joyce lest anything came of it. In order to please her therefore when next they met, she playfully charged the girl with making a conquest, which was a mistake. Joyce denied it with fury, but Mrs. Ivery's deprecating but pleased surprise was not lost upon the elder woman, and she decided to keep her eyes open.

2

One afternoon Roger Perch, going back to Brindlea after giving Mr. Scot a run, was annoyed to see Mrs. Bryce-Spencer crashing towards him through the coppice. She was not in sight of the hut, it was true, but had apparently come in through the fence near his own drive. Nevertheless,

he was determined to keep her sharp nose out of here for Gillian's sake, and he called to her peremptorily:

"I say, go back, if you don't mind . . . quick. If you want a word with me, I'll come down to the road. . . . No, don't wait for me. This place isn't safe."

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer obeyed from sheer astonishment, and Perch leisurely joined her.

"This is forbidden territory at the moment," he explained. "Perhaps I should have a warning notice up, but my man thought it unnecessary, as nobody comes into the coppice from the village."

"Dear me, isn't he a stern landlord, then, bless him. But don't scold poor little me. I didn't know there was any mystery about this piece of ground."

"Loads of it," retorted Perch imperturbably. "Shall I let you into the secret?"

"Oh, *do*."

"If you or anyone else comes into this coppice," said Roger, "the undertaker and the coroner will be working overtime. See those old trees?—they are a continual danger, and I should hate to have your death on my conscience, Mrs. Bryce-Spencer. We are having them down and thinning the others, and until the work is done I must beg you to take some other path to wherever you were bound for."

"Then you will be able to spare me some logs. How too sweet of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Bryce-Spencer at once.

"That will depend on your keeping alive to use them,"

Roger pointed out with a faint smile; "also upon what the workmen are able to spare after doing some repairs on the estate."

"Dear Mr. Perch, how wonderful Brindlea will be with all these improvements. And when are we to have a housewarming, for you must let me play hostess for you, of course."

"Thank you for offering, but that would never do," protested Roger. "Mrs. Ivery, being such an old friend of my family, will, I know, take pity on me when the occasion arrives."

She laughed.

"Ah, poor man, I had forgotten that as a bachelor you would be of deep interest to these poor mothers with daughters on their hands," she cried.

And with this parting shot, she tramped off, waving a mirthful hand.

"Not so foxy. Pure cat!" reflected Roger. He would have given something to know a little more about these precious tenants. The woman rather amused him, but he thought Bryce-Spencer a distinctly shady-looking character, and was amazed that he was received apparently without question by the Iverys and the Chancellors. The vicar was, by reason of his calling, unworldly, but Colonel Ivery, as a soldier, might be expected to be a fair judge of men. The Iverys were kindly folk, however, and were perhaps sorry for the woman, forced to cadge for her vegetables, firewood

and heaven knew what else, by a husband who was too lazy to support her.

He hoped he had frightened her out of the coppice, and determined to have some of the trees near the road cut down forthwith, yet he was not altogether easy in his mind about Gillian and the dark gentleman. It might be safer, if she would agree, to let the little chap finish his convalescence at Brindlea, where he would not have to be shut up, to bark upon prying passers-by.

Another problem about the dog was worrying Roger, for this afternoon he had chanced upon the plate on his collar, and the inscription: "Jock Hanson, 121 Winsett Gardens, S.W." He was convinced that Gillian had not yet discovered her orphan actually had a home and owner, and he knew it would break her heart to part with him now. Jock's sorry condition of some days ago did not seem to argue that the owner deserved much consideration. On the other hand, the dog might have been stolen. After pondering the matter all the evening, Roger decided to run up to town next day and make some cautious inquiries. The nearest police station to Winsett Gardens might know if the loss had been reported.

3

As he drove his small car through outer London he decided to be wary in his inquiries. It was none of his business

to give the dog's whereabouts away. In fact, he was perfectly willing to commit a mild crime in a good cause. If the little dog was being sought, he felt half inclined to buy a new collar and remove the present one before she found out. If necessary, he would buy the dog, cost what it might.

He made for Winsett Square in order to ask directions to the nearest police station, and his quest was ended. From the balcony of Number 121 hung a board:

FOR SALE

> In the estate of the late Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Hanson deceased, this commodious, freehold residence will be sold by auction on December 1st at 3 p.m. together with—etc.

Roger read no more, and was just about to drive off when a thought struck him. Stopping his engine, he got out and rang the bell of Jock's former home. The cook, caretaker until the sale, opened the door.

"I wanted Mrs. Hanson, but I see——" began the young man, nodding towards the sale notice.

"Yes, sir, over two weeks ago," explained Cook volubly, "after a long illness my poor mistress was took. If you was a friend, sir, Mr. Greville 'as charge of everythink, the lawyer, sir, seeing as Mrs. 'Anson 'ad no family. . . ."

"No, I won't trouble him, thank you," said Roger. "I

was merely inquiring for a friend. I didn't know Mrs. Hanson personally."

He drove off, happy in the assurance he would be able to give Gillian—that the dark-complexioned gentleman was an orphan after all, but he bought the new collar and a handsome lead to match. She would need this soon now the invalid was picking up.

4

Back at Brindlea, he decided to change the collar at once, and if she noticed it to say the dog had had a birthday. Next morning he must be on hand when she came out, to urge the removal of the invalid to the house.

"Come along, Scot, old chap, I have a present for you —new clothes," he said, opening the hut door and receiving a warm reception.

Jock smelt the new collar and submitted to the removal of the old one with some boredom. He had never thought much of it and was justly indignant when this man, who was only a friend and not a lover, insisted on buckling on the other, which was stiff to a fellow's neck. He walked round himself distressfully trying to push it off, but this, with one leg out of action, was difficult and he sat down at last and barked reproaches. It took some time to patch up this misunderstanding between them, for Jock was a dog of character and not to be trifled with.

That night, he wrestled with the collar, an easier matter, he found, lying down, and by the time his lady arrived he had such a dishevelled appearance about the neck that she soon discovered the change of clothes. She took him in her arms and held him fast, her gray eyes full of tragedy, for she knew perfectly well what was on the other collar. She had known it for two miserable days.

CHAPTER X

He Moves to Larger and More Commodious Quarters

1

ROGER PERCH saw lightning that morning with a vengeance. She confronted him fiercely, asking what he meant by daring to take the other collar away.

"Why, isn't the new one comfortable? Let's ease it a bit for him," he suggested, advancing upon the patient. "Must have a change of clothes sometimes, you know. It is only decent."

"I suppose you thought I was going to steal him and say nothing," she said, her pale cheeks flaming. "I've only just found out. . . . I thought if my father's estate is settled soon I might try to buy him . . . but I know there isn't much hope."

Her voice broke and at this Perch exclaimed in distress:

"No, no . . . the little chap's yours. . . . You have no need to buy him. I hoped you hadn't yet found the address."

"I found it the day before yesterday. . . . I haven't known what to do."

"You poor child." Afraid to try any more personal way to cheer her, he lifted up the dusky gentleman. "Here, Jock Scot, tell your mother there's no need to worry, and you haven't any other home than this. . . . Fact, really, Miss Ivery. I happened to be in London yesterday and drove in through Winsett Square to have a look at the place. This Mrs. Hanson died two weeks ago and the house is for sale."

"You are making it up, just to relieve my mind," she exclaimed, between hope and doubt, as she took her dog from him and with shaking hands began to unwind the bandage and set to work.

"No, true as life. I had a word with the caretaker when I found from a notice of sale the lady was safely dead. She had been ill a long time and left no family." Roger was beginning to feel slightly embarrassed about his impulsive rush to London, so continued in extenuation, "You see, it might have been no place for a decent dog, and as Chairman of the Society for the Protection of Orphan Pups, I had to make sure of that in case your honesty compelled you to return him. The thing is as clear as day now. The old lad's owner died, so he went out into the world to seek his fortune . . . found it, too, didn't you, Jock the Scot?"

"If you're really serious and not just making it all up,"

objected Gillian, "why did you bother to change his collar?"

"I was afraid you might find the name and address and go on losing sleep over it and never give me a hint. . . . As visiting physician I have to keep an eye on the health of the staff. . . . Look here, you unmitigated unbeliever, make an excuse to go to London, and run out to Winsett Square and see for yourself. . . . Ah, that's better, and I wondered when the rent was going to be paid."

"I do think it was good of you," she said, fighting to steady her voice. "I daresay you think I'm a complete idiot about him, but he's such an interest. I am not used to—to having no responsibilities."

"I know. . . . You are as new to this place as I am, aren't you? We must exchange experiences, one of these days . . . foreigners, that's what we are." He smiled at her, longing to chase the shadows from her face. "By the way, I came out to have a serious talk with you about the patient, Miss Ivery. I met Mrs. Bryce-Spencer nosing about this copse yesterday—near the road luckily, and I hope I frightened her off the scene for good. Still, you never know. I believe Jock-the-Scot would be safer at Brindlea."

"I couldn't encroach on your kindness like that," protested Gillian, looking troubled. "You don't think she saw him?"

"No, but my housekeeper is a good old thing, and would be glad to have an eye to him, and now he's getting better

it is hard on him to be shut up so much. There's a side gate up here leading directly to the house, and you could run over and look after him just as usual without meeting a soul. Think it over and try to slip across during the day, and I'll let you have a word with Mrs. Burrows. Anyone seeing him at Brindlea would think he was simply the house-dog and take no notice, but naturally if people pass the hut he barks, and we've got to admit this is an odd place to keep a dog locked up."

"Yes, I know. . . . I have felt that. I can't let him be an expense to you, though, and besides, Mr. Perch, wouldn't Mrs. Bryce-Spencer be certain to see him if she has the run of your gardens?" asked Gillian.

"Run of my gardens? This is a new one to me. Is this her latest essay in fiction?"

"No, she didn't say so. Perhaps I'm telling tales out of school."

Gillian told him of the day when she had looked through the hedge in order to do battle with him, and had seen the lady. Roger, hiding his wrath, said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer must have had permission from Burrows (with inward apologies to the latter for such a scandalous libel), and assured her he had put his foot down about that.

"I am superintending the work in the gardens myself," he assured her, "and she won't show her face there, if I know it, Miss Ivery. . . . Perhaps it isn't a fair ques-

tion . . . but I would give something to know what your people think of my precious tenants."

"That's what I can't make out myself," exclaimed Gillian eagerly. "I'm afraid my uncle and aunt are terribly innocent."

Roger shouted with delight at her serious face.

2

Gillian went home to breakfast. She had promised to think over the proposed move, but she knew in her heart she would do as he suggested. From the beginning she had looked forward in alarm to the time when her dog would be so far recovered that the confinement would be a distress to him; and though Roger's sudden participation in her double life had eased this difficulty a little, she saw that the freedom of Brindlea was a heaven she could not deny him. He would be safe too in Roger's hands. The man who stole foxes under the noses of the Meet would be an efficient protector for a dusky gentleman, and an amusing companion for him too. Jock-the-Scot had a sense of humor.

Almost rosy with her walk, Gillian surprised a compliment from her aunt that morning. "The child looks really pretty," thought Mrs. Ivery. "It must be the good English air and sensible country life." She was not an insular woman, but she had an incurable suspicion that the Conti-

nent, pleasant enough for a visit, was insanitary as well as rather immoral as a place of residence. And then Gillian's father had been an artist, and that was always a pity.

"Very sensible of you to take a nice brisk walk before breakfast, dear," she said. "I see that it is doing you good."

Joyce came in at the moment, complaining of such a night of toothache that it was decided she and her mother had better go up to town to see the dentist by an early train. Chinko was to be one of the party and, lest she should be urged to go too, Gillian exclaimed:

"Then Micky and I will amuse each other and have a walk. . . . Shall I take him out, Joyce?"

"Yes, he'd love it," said Joyce.

The Colonel drove his wife and daughter to Ferris Royale for their train, and Gillian, enchanted by this fortunate turn of events, set out with Micky through the coppice to Brindlea. She avoided the neighborhood of Mr. Scot's hospital, feeling almost a traitor to her darling, but Micky was a responsibility, and she wanted Roger's support when she introduced the two dogs. Skirting the hedge of Brindlea gardens she peered through it, but this time saw no lady marauders. Someone was whistling, however, and Micky, a responsive dog, ran towards the gate, ears flopping, and barked when he found it shut.

Roger Perch came round from the front of the house immediately.

"Hullo," he exclaimed in surprise. "Why, you careless girl, you've brought the wrong dog."

"No, he's a temporary orphan. Joyce has gone up to London," explained Gillian, "and I thought he and Jock Scot ought to get to know each other a little. Micky's opinion will count a lot when the time comes."

Roger laughed, and said it was a ripe scheme. He was charmed to have her actually beside him at Brindlea and, before calling Mrs. Burrows, insisted that she must view the house from every angle to make sure that she approved of it as the new hospital. They went round to the front and walked along the low terrace with its mossy balustrades, and its stone vases filled with ivy, long strands of which had climbed along the wall. There was an old and kindly beauty about the place which Gillian loved at sight. Brindlea had weathered the centuries with an unruffled front, had known a gay and gallant youth, no doubt, had seen its sons go out into the world, to Waterloo perhaps and even earlier campaigns, to sail the Seven Seas, to die, but there had always been one to come back, as Roger had come. That gave it stability, and confidence to ignore the changing years.

"Aren't you terribly thrilled that you belong to it?" she asked him, and he wondered what instinct had made her put it like that, aware in a flash that she was right. He had been at Brindlea hardly three weeks, but already it owned him, body and soul.

"More thrilled than you can believe. I never hoped to inherit, you see. My cousin was not an old man. . . . People down here shake their heads over the poverty of the place and the loss of Brindlea land. Can't they see the fun of working for it?"

"They're mad," said Gillian solemnly.

He looked at her, enchanted, and suddenly they were laughing together, happy in their scorn of a silly world. Before them the old house smiled serenely, for how often had it watched such scenes before, throughout the generations? Brindlea would still have sons.

3

Roger told her of his plans for the place, and she listened with excitement, urging him on. This was something she could understand. At Ferris, it had seemed to her, everyone was content to sit down and do nothing in particular, but she knew she could never bear to live like that, and she envied Roger with his home to serve and fight for.

"Don't let the gardens be all prinked and proper, will you?" she said. "I mean like ours. I know my aunt's herbaceous border is very fine, but Brindlea doesn't need finery."

"No, I agree with you there; but come and look at this." He led her down a narrow path, and showed her a tangled

wilderness with a worn, stone basin in the center. "It has been a kind of pleasance and I mean to restore it to life and order . . . cut the roses back, and put in all the little old great-grandmotherly flowers in a border round the grass. Prim, it will be. Like it?"

"Perfect! It must be very old."

"Yes, and that's another lark. I've dug up a regular mint of old bills and receipts and letters about the estate. During the evenings I am going to get them into order and have them in a huge cutting book. It will be like a private history—a sort of Brindlea Book. We'll find out when this little pleasance was made with a bit of luck. Some old Perch had a soft spot for the birds. That's a bath for the blighters, not a fountain. Burrows wants to have it out, but I tell him it will keep their minds off his fruit trees. . . . Now come along, we have to move that hospital, and of course you must see the patient's quarters."

Mrs. Burrows was summoned to consultation and received the ever-friendly Micky with such hospitality that Gillian saw the Scotch gentleman would be in kindly hands. He was to have the run of the house and a small hedged section of garden behind it, except when Perch or Gillian took him further afield. A side door leading through a short flagged passage to the hall, was to be unlatched first thing in the morning, so that Gillian could whistle him out at any hour of the day. As for food, Mrs. Burrows

said she would be thankful to have a dog to eat the bones left on her hands, for the waste fair went to her heart.

"I believe you told her to say that, because it's ridiculous," declared Gillian as they went off to the hut.

"Ridiculous? Not at all," said Roger indignantly. "I'm a hungry man to cater for, I can tell you. Mrs. Burrows could hardly have a bone-ier job."

4

Jock the Scot, lying in his hut, through the chinks of which the morning sun crept in distractingly, so that he sighed to be out of doors, heard footsteps he knew, and raised his voice in an uproarious welcome, then paused in surprise, because he had been answered in his own tongue. There was another dog out there. What was the meaning of it?

Bristling with excitement, he barked this time to let the fellow know he was the king of the castle and would stand no nonsense; and then the door was pulled open and his lady caught him in her arms.

"Darling, it's all right, we've brought you a friend. . . . This is Micky. You mustn't bark at poor Micky."

Jock the Scot growled and demanded to be put down to see into the matter. This, he seemed to say, was not an affair for arbitration. He would judge for himself.

Perch, half-kneeling on the grass, held Micky by the

collar, whispering words of reassurance into his silken ears. The spaniel quivered a little but he was not an aggressive beast, and answered Jock's war-like remarks more from habit than conviction.

The Scot, placed on his three good legs at last, limped up to the intruder, at first suspicious and then curious, his lady following anxiously lest war should be declared. She loved the black rascal's bossy manner, but it would never do for Micky to go home with a scratch on his nose.

Micky, however, after a sniff or two, made amiable overtures to the dark gentleman, his tail waving friendship. Jock, like a good conservative, sat down to consider the question, and at this Perch released the spaniel, holding Gillian back when she tried to interfere.

"Don't worry, I can part them in a minute if it comes to a fight . . . and I don't think it will."

Micky approached and circled round Jock, then made off for a game among the leaves. The dog of the house looked at him with his head on one side and then yawned as much as to say this was childish, but he strolled towards the reveller, who promptly rolled in the grass, his shaggy legs waving. He got up again and shook himself before dashing off flirtatiously. Jock, deciding to indulge the child, bolted after him, a somewhat bumpy course in his crippled condition, but not without speed.

Perch whistled, and the two came bounding back almost neck and neck; Gillian threw a stick down the track and

The two dogs rioted together happily.

they fell over each other as they ran for it, Jock seizing it with a growl of joy and bringing it back.

"He thinks he's a lion," cried Gillian, delighted.

"Of course he's a lion," said Perch. "I thought everyone knew that."

While the move was in progress the two dogs rioted together happily, whistled back from time to time when they went too far afield. It was decided the cushion and scarf should accompany the patient to make him feel more at home in his new surroundings, but Gillian stole the pictures unblushingly, saying that he would need them later on when he set up housekeeping on his own account. As the dog's guardian she had to protect his property.

Roger, having failed to get them away from her, took out his fountain pen and did some work on the door. Blacking out the former inscription, he wrote:

PREMISES COMING DOWN

The Lion Has Removed

to

Larger and more commodious

QUARTERS

"I *hope* Mrs. Bryce-Spencer will come into this coppice," he said.

CHAPTER XI

He Becomes a Fellow of Consequence but does not Appear in Society

1

JOCK was once more a dog of importance and lived like a pre-war lord, as his lady often told him. He had a man to brush his clothes every morning, and one momentous day, after careful consultation, his bandage was removed, and this same minion gave him a bath. The improvement in his appearance was now remarkable. He was a burnished and dashing gentleman, very smartly turned out. He and his friend, the man, spent a great deal of time together, superintending affairs in the garden and generally running the place. Jock found plenty to do chasing the birds and making authoritative remarks to any strangers who set foot on this territory. He was not a fellow to shirk his responsibilities, and after dark as he sat with the man at dinner, or lay luxuriously before the library fire at his feet, he kept his ears open for suspicious sounds.

"A rare watch-dog though he is such a little feller," said Mrs. Burrows, who was now one of his minor slaves. "I

declare 'e's quite a comfort to have about the 'ouse. Company too, 'e is."

"The bouquets that get thrown at you, Jock-Scot, would turn any lion's head," said Roger at this.

The man talked to him a great deal; life had become very conversational and Jock approved of this, having been brought up to it by his earliest love. She perhaps had faded from his mind, that poor lady who had so unaccountably deserted him, or perhaps her identity had become merged in that of the newer love, whose step was a signal to his loyal heart. All the pampering in the world seemed to make no difference to that allegiance. At the sound of her soft whistle at the door a black streak shot through the house, and he was off with her, every hair of his glossy coat expressing the joy that was in him. When she left him he looked after her with wistful eyes, for this was the only shadow on the brightness of his day. His love ought to be living in this house. Why wasn't she?

The man on these occasions was generally somewhere at hand to offer what consolation he could.

"Too bad, isn't it, but you just wait a bit," he would advise in a confidential tone.

Roger kept in the background during her early morning visits to the dog because he felt it was unfair to rush her. She was a darling; his views about her comings and goings agreed with Jock's to the letter, but he must not frighten her away. How could he tell if she ever gave him

a thought? When they met outside, though she paid Jock's rent with interest, he rarely had a private word with her, and often wished her cousin's obvious attachment to her were of a less literal nature. Not that he disliked Joyce Ivery. He had enough insight to realize that the girl's gruff manner was in great part due to a paralyzing shyness. But that his presence had increased the paralysis naturally did not enter his head.

Beth Willison was continuing her campaign of ostentatious neglect and this amused him mightily; the only one of the four girls with whom he felt instantly at ease on public occasions was Lal, whose loves and hatreds had been all laid bare to him in the choicest slang at her command.

"The B-Spencers are going away for the week-end," confided Lal to him one afternoon. "We ought to celebrate, purification from sin of Ferris Minor."

"The what did you call them?" demanded Roger sternly.

"Well, it's their name," said Lal, looking suspiciously innocent. "Peter says the initial suits them admirably. What do you think of your toothy tenant, Roger-Podger?"

"Never you mind," said Perch severely.

"Yes, I dislike 'em too," said Lal at once.

"But she's a friend of your parents, you undutiful child."

"Friend? Oh no, but my poor parents think everyone has been sent to Ferris Minor for some good purpose."

Roger laughed, but going home later he was glad of Lal's information about the week-end. The absence of his tenants, whom he was determined not to invite to Brindlea until he knew more about them, would give an opportunity for the house-warming, at which Mrs. Bryce-Spencer had offered to preside. He was not yet prepared for any ceremonious entertaining, but the Iverys and Chancellors had been kind to him, and he liked the old Willison couple. He must return hospitality, however mildly.

He consulted Mrs. Burrows, who beamed upon his suggestion of guests to tea on Saturday afternoon, and curbed his somewhat wild ideas of the quantity of supplies that would be needed. She set about driving the maids immediately, for she meant to have no aspersions cast upon her housekeeping by the ladies of Ferris, and she was charmed to exercise her talent as a baker of cakes once more.

"I can give you a cake that you wouldn't know from a cauliflower—not till you cut it, sir," declared Mrs. Burrows with pride.

"No?" said Roger, visibly impressed.

He took care not to mention his plan outside until Friday, when he was satisfied the Bryce-Spencers had actually departed. The toothy tenant, as Lal called her, was quite capable of abandoning the week-end if she heard of it, he was sure. He called at the vicarage and upon the Iverys to deliver his invitations in person, and sent a note to Mrs. Willison. Everyone was delighted.

Mrs. Ivery, when he begged her to act as hostess for him, felt that Joyce had certainly made a conquest. This was a sign. She decided that she must give the young people every opportunity to see each other, for really it would be a great comfort to have the dear child settled so near them, and quite a good marriage, too, in these hard times.

Luckily she was tactful enough to keep these thoughts to herself, or Joyce would assuredly have been stricken with toothache or some other malady by Saturday afternoon.

On the morning of the party Roger thought he had a good excuse to appear at the reunion of Jock and his lady. As though by accident he sauntered into view as Gillian was bringing the Scottish gentleman back from a run in the coppice.

"Oh, I say, Miss Ivery, would you mind coming and having a look at the scene of the fray?" he demanded. "Mrs. Burrows is a jewel, with a light hand for cakes, but I suspect she has a heavy one for flowers, and I want your advice."

He led the way through one of the long windows into the drawing-room from the terrace. Gillian followed him cautiously, Jock with abandon. This was better. She was coming in. Perhaps now she would stay.

The room ran through the house, opening into the garden at the further end, and on the right was a curved window of real beauty which looked across a sloping lawn to the

little pleasance. The carpet and hangings were faded, and the room looked slightly forlorn, as bachelors' drawing-rooms often do, the chairs standing in martial order round the walls, as though never moved, and the flowers stuck into bowls with a very firm hand.

"Won't it hurt her feelings if we alter them?" asked Gillian.

Roger, whose own hand had done the deed with cunning for this very purpose, assured her Mrs. Burrows would never notice, and then watched with delight as she touched the flowers with her quick fingers, and moved the jars here and there, until the room began to glow.

Jock the Scot followed these proceedings with interest and attention, sitting beside her when she was still, marching busily after her as she moved.

"He won't be able to come to the party," she said with sudden anxiety to Roger. "I hope he won't mind. How will you manage with him?"

"By Jove, I had forgotten the old lad mustn't be seen," said Roger in consternation. "I'll have to get Mrs. Burrows to keep him under her eye."

Jock looked from one to the other, as though quite aware that he was concerned in this discussion, and Gillian sat on the floor and put her arms round him.

"You won't mind, will you?" she pleaded.

"After all, old Scot, lions don't usually come to parties," urged Roger reasonably. "Oh, hang the dashed party! I'm

sorry there's going to be one, if you are to feel anxious all the time."

"No, I won't really," said Gillian, jumping up again. "Of course you must have your party. He can't monopolize the whole house. I never heard of such a thing. . . . But if they all bring their dogs he may bark. . . . Please don't bark, sweetheart."

"Are the dogs coming then?" inquired Roger. "This isn't a dog party, and I think they should wait till they're invited. I see now I've done this show all wrong. I should have had printed invitations with 'No Dogs' in the corner."

"Well, Beth always takes Milord with her—Lal says she feels undressed without him—and naturally the others don't see why he should hold the floor."

"Mr. Scot, I hope you will never become embroiled in these village politics," said Roger. "After all, old chap, I should begin as I mean to go on and stand aloof, don't you think?"

Jock wagged his tail because he liked to be consulted, and this was translated as acquiescence.

2

Everyone came to the tea-party except Miss Willison and her dog. Beth sent a message that she had so *many* engagements, but her mother, who liked Roger Perch, put it more kindly than that and hoped he would not be hurt

by her daughter's absence. Roger, needless to say, bore the blow well.

Peter came with his parents and immediately attached himself to Lal, no doubt to assist her with the obstreperous Wog. This proved an easy matter, for freed of the superior presence of Milord, who always made their several owners fussy and anxious to show them off, Chinko, Micky and Wog were at their best. Most dogs will behave intelligently if let alone, and a foolish dog is a reflection upon his human guardian.

Wog indeed won applause by opening the door on to the terrace and hinting that the gardens looked inviting. The men were delighted because they wanted to hear Perch's plans for the place; so a move was made out of doors before tea while the light held, Wog and Micky leading the way with enthusiasm. Chinko having gone a few yards with them sat down muttering and waited for Mrs. Ivery. He was no athlete and preferred to ride in her arms.

Gillian slipped behind the others, but Joyce, discovering her absence, ran back to seek her. They needn't imagine she was going to stay and talk to Roger Perch without Gillian's assistance. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's hints had made her more than ever self-conscious with him and she was terribly afraid her mother was taking them seriously, which was absurd. Joyce wondered fiercely why older people couldn't let you alone.

Roger, seeing her run off, excused himself and followed

her, little guessing how this innocent action would disturb her.

He could guess why Gillian was holding back, and he meant to seize Joyce Ivery and take her out of the way. Joyce, however, was so alarmed at the prospect of having to talk to him alone that she almost ran along the terrace, and Gillian, hearing her steps, came out, and said breathlessly:

"Oh, there you are. I was just looking at the pictures."

Roger, joining them at the moment, gave her a reassuring smile behind Joyce's back, as he remarked sternly:

"Come along, you deserters. I can't have my flock straying like this."

Somewhere in the house Jock raised his voice indignantly and Joyce, halfway to the terrace steps, stopped with an exclamation.

"That can't be Micky trespassing in the house."

"Oh, dear, no, Micky would never do such a thing," declared Perch easily.

"How do *you* know?"

"He has such an honest face."

Gillian laughed and Joyce echoed her, looking at her companions with wistful envy. It was all very well for them, but they hadn't mothers watching ready to purr and build all sorts of hopes, because somebody took a little notice of them. Joyce was afraid her mother had sent him back for her and she was filled with shame at the thought.

He was nice too. She could have enjoyed the afternoon immensely if he and she and Gillian had been alone. . . . Gillian could talk to him and, even when she didn't, she looked natural and jolly, but Joyce was acutely aware that her own silences were awkward and he must think her a fool.

3

The dark gentleman had spent an hour or so in the small hedged garden at the back of the house, but when the visitors set out on their tour of inspection, Mrs. Burrows thought it wiser to bring him indoors to the kitchen quarters. Hearing strangers and feeling himself responsible for this household, he wished to go and see about it, and said so peremptorily, but the women, hitherto fairly intelligent, refused to understand his arguments. At last he grew so noisy that Mrs. Burrows picked him up and carried him to a room on the first floor on the further side of the house, and actually invited him to sleep on an eiderdown.

This desperate measure succeeded for a little while, because eiderdowns had been familiar to him once upon a time and it was exciting to see one again; but by-and-by he got up to search the strange room and find out if he approved of it, and then he mounted the window-seat to look at the world outside.

There were his gardens, which it was his business to protect, and they were full of strangers. He barked, but

they were too far away to hear at the moment, so he got down and scratched vainly at the closed door. It was very distressing and at last he returned to try the window again. When the glass resisted him, he sat peering out in a worried manner, shivering with excitement and complaining to himself.

He ought to be out there and he knew it, and when a large stranger dog came bouncing into view, the dark gentleman could stand it no longer and raged at the intruder in no uncertain voice.

The stranger ceased bouncing and looked round in surprise, and seeing Micky running towards him, supposed it was a game, and tumbled him over like a ninepin. The dark gentleman, outraged that any friend of his should be so assaulted, lifted his voice even higher and scratched the relentless glass with his one useful front paw. The other two dogs, ceasing their game, dashed to the space of gravel below and such an altercation began that the returning party were immediately alarmed. Lal and Joyce were on the point of racing to the rescue, but Perch caught each by one arm reproachfully.

"Leave them alone. They are only having a game, and I have something to show you here." Turning them back from the house he led the way to the little pleasance, talking as he went, and gathered the party round him as one about to deliver a lecture.

"You see before you, ladies and gentlemen. . . . Now

He lifted his voice even higher and scratched the relentless glass with his one useful front paw.

then, Miss Joyce, don't I make a good guide to the ruins? You must listen to this. It's quite a story."

Joyce glancing behind her, had seen the dusky gentleman peering out, but she did not see Gillian slip away from the party, and by-and-by when Perch had invented a long and romantic tale about the pleasance, and the group continued its way to the house, she was surprised to find Roger still holding her arm, and no cousin handy as a way of escape.

"Where's Gillian?" she demanded gruffly.

"By Jove, she must have gone in for her coat," said Roger. "I wanted to fetch it for her, but she's such an independent girl, your cousin."

"Well, I don't blame her. Why do you keep your dog shut up?"

"I have no dog, alas. You don't want to get rid of Micky, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. I wouldn't give him to the King."

"Poor old George!"

"And I *saw* a dog at one of the windows too."

"Oh yes, of course, there is a dog in the house, but he owns my housekeeper."

"Then she oughtn't to shut him up like that. It's cruel."

"I'll speak to her about it," promised Roger gravely, "but don't be harsh with her, because she means well. She wouldn't think it becoming to let him appear when I have these distinguished dogs to tea."

He thought it was as well Gillian couldn't hear this libel of Jock-Scot, and hoped he had set Miss Ivery's suspicions at rest.

Joyce, however, had no suspicions. She had merely been making desperate efforts at conversation, distressfully certain that her mother behind her was beaming with approval, so that everybody would see.

Gillian, meanwhile, sprinting for the house, unable to bear that wistful dark face at the window, ran in and up the stairs, cautiously opening doors until she found the

right one. At her whistle he was down from his post in a moment, ready to dash out and clear the place of those intruders, but she caught him and held him back.

"You mustn't, sweetheart. I know it's very hard to have to miss the party, but you are still a bit of an invalid and they might suspect you of germs." She sat on the bed with him begging him to go to sleep, but the dark gentleman was far too wide awake for anything so infantile, and when a cautious glance through the window told her the others were coming in to tea, she decided he had better be taken to his garden again. She was halfway down the stairs when the first steps in the hall sent her hurrying back, holding his dusky nose in a way that thoroughly astonished him. At last the coast seemed clear and she crept to the kitchen entrance and pushed the door ajar, thrusting her burden into Mrs. Burrows' arms.

It was at this moment that Joyce slipped out in search of her, and so the two girls came face to face.

"I wish you'd let me see him," said Joyce.

"Who?" breathed Gillian, turning white.

"The housekeeper's dog."

"Oh!" Gillian saw that Roger had had the presence of mind to explain the dark gentleman away, and breathed a sigh of relief. "Micky might be hurt if he smelt another dog on you. You have to be careful," she said.

"Yes, I suppose he would, I hadn't thought of that. Gillian, stick to me and don't keep running away."

"All right, I won't stir again."

The two girls joined the company, and Mrs. Ivery exclaimed:

"Where have you been, Joyce? Really, you mustn't wander about Mr. Perch's house, without his permission."

"Please, Mrs. Ivery, it's a delightful compliment," declared Roger at once.

Joyce looked at her mother suspiciously. She was sure she could hear her purr.

CHAPTER XII

He Plays with Two Babes in the Wood

1

MRS. IVERY, to do her justice, would have been horrified to know that she had betrayed her hopes to Joyce or anyone else, but it did seem to her that Mr. Perch was most attentive, and surely in asking her to preside at the party he had shown a distinct preference. She was Joyce's mother.

When some days later the Chancellors announced the engagement of their daughter Lalage to Peter Willison, she saw the finger of fate in it, for though Lal was not perhaps a serious rival, she was at least another girl, thought Mrs. Ivery profoundly.

The vicar and Mrs. Chancellor had not dreamt of losing Lal for years, it turned out, but Peter, having persuaded his father to buy him a partnership, had spoken to the vicar at once in the most manly way, and dear little Lal, when consulted by her astonished parents, had said demurely that she would like to marry Peter very much, thank you. It had been a touching scene. Joyce, when she

heard it, thought Lal had all the luck. She envied her, not the engagement, which she had known was coming for months, but her unsuspecting parents. That she thought was how parents ought to be.

Beth was scornful of her brother's choice, but had actually, with the assistance of Milord and Wog, precipitated it in the end.

It happened that a village child, nearly run over by a passing car, had howled so lustily with fright that the distressed motorist had pulled up and given her half a crown. This act provided the lads of the place with a bright idea, and one choice spirit tried it on Miss Willison, falling flat in the road beside her coupé and yelling as though sorely injured.

Beth, aware that she had not touched him, got out and shook the offender and, when he ran off laughing wickedly, she followed him to complain to his mother.

In her excitement she had left the door of the coupé open and this attractive sight met the eye of young Wog, who had opened the vicarage gate and come out to see the world. A ride or two with Peter had already given him a taste for motoring; so he ran gaily up, jumped on the footboard and prepared to get into the car.

Milord, waiting patiently inside it, was indignant at this intrusion and thrust his great head out with a growl that sent the astonished puppy reeling back into the road.

Milord leapt after him, and to the delight of the boys,

a fight ensued. The older dog would have been a fine creature in the right hands, but, as Peter often told his sister, she kept him for show and treated him like a piece of furniture instead of a highly sensitive and intelligent animal. Milord had little exercise and less interest in life, but the insolence of this bristling pup standing ready for battle awoke his spirit and he laid into him with a will.

Wog was game enough but inexperienced and it would have gone hard with him if Beth had not rushed into the fray. She grabbed the lead from the car, pushed aside the circle of delighted lads and lashed at the little airedale as though he were a ravening beast intent on devouring Milord. Then she dragged her reluctant dog by the collar into the coupé and drove off with him, much to the indignation of the onlookers.

Wog with a torn ear but a high heart was escorted from his first fight to the vicarage by an admiring throng who told a highly colorful story of the attack by that "great dorg of Miss Willison's."

Peter, hearing of it later, had words with his sister on the subject, and Beth's slighting reference to Wog and Wog's owner brought forth the announcement that he intended to marry the latter.

Everyone therefore considered Wog to have made the match. Lal, Peter and Joyce, who knew better, thought it would be a pity to undeceive them.

2

Roger sometimes cursed his own suggestion about removing Mr. Scot's hospital, which had provided such an excellent opportunity for meeting Gillian on more or less neutral territory, for by now she was rarely out of his thoughts. He loved her gray eyes, which seemed to darken as he watched them, and her little firm mouth that he knew how to make turn up at the corners, and the way she walked with her dog as though to conquer the world. He loved equally her sedateness and her enthusiasms, and each time he saw her, hated to let her go. Through Jock the Scot, and equally through their individual experiences in a different world from this, they had been from the first completely natural with each other. He had told her many of his adventures, and he alone in Ferris Minor had heard of her wanderings with her father through Italy and France, and sensed how deeply lonely she was for those lost delights.

Fear of spoiling this happy relationship made Roger hesitate to join her as often as he would have liked, when she slipped over to see Jock. It seemed unfair to take advantage of her, and yet he knew he was losing precious opportunities which all too soon would be denied him. When the day arrived for the dusky gentleman's presentation to Ferris Minor, these stolen visits would cease, alas, for he could not believe the Iverys would refuse to

let her have the little chap. On that day he saw he would put his fate to the test, but to do it while Jock the Scot was in his charge would be a dirty trick.

One afternoon when Joyce and Lal were deep in the question of the trousseau, and Mrs. Ivery at the vicarage, Gillian slipped away to Brindlea and found Jock and the owner playing with a ball which squealed enticingly when caught. It was a new ball and Jock was charmed with it. growling with joy as he ran it to earth. Burrows appeared and stood by watching benevolently, and was called as a witness by Perch to tell Jock's owner what an excellent lion he was to have about the place.

"Lions is what we want too," said old Burrows, "but an 'ole den of lions wouldn't keep some people's noses out, not a couple of hyenas neither."

"Burrows counts his carrots and turnips every morning," said Perch, not without a sharp glance at the old man.

"Well, somebody's got to," said Burrows darkly. "Not that he isn't a fine little feller, miss, and real sharp with his tongue when strangers come to the house."

"Does he mean people are stealing his carrots?" asked Gillian as the man went off to his work. "It seeems a funny thing to steal."

"Foxes about perhaps," suggested Roger.

"Yes, that's one of your titles you forgot—'President of the Honorable Society of Fox-Stealers'. . . . Come along, you black rascal, if you want a run."

The black rascal came with alacrity, but Roger exclaimed:

"If you are going to bury the babe in the wood, it is my duty as the wicked uncle to be of the party."

He opened the gate into the coppice and Jock shot through, hunted among the fallen leaves in a business-like manner, and then came back for his slaves. Finding them engrossed in each other, he hopped beside them importantly, until such neglect of him struck him as a little too much. So he advanced a few yards and flung himself down as though fatigued.

"Dead dog!" said Roger encouragingly, and Jock, who had not heard this phrase for many months, quivered with joy, stretched himself stiff and closed his eyes.

"Oh, darling, you're perfect!" cried Gillian, sitting down beside him. "You are the most brilliant dog that ever was . . . or is it that have you been teaching him to do it?"

Roger, smiling down at her, shook his head.

"It's sheer talent. The dog understands English."

Her lips began to turn up at the corners in the way he loved.

"You didn't think him so wonderful that first day. You laughed."

"Yes, and saw stars. 'You give me one look,' as Mrs. Burrows would say."

"Oh, I didn't."

"Fact. I've never been the same man since. Everyone must have noticed it."

"They think you grow nicer and nicer," said Gillian mischievously. "I've heard them say so."

"She smiles as if she didn't agree with them, Jock the Scot," exclaimed Roger in hurt surprise. "What do you think of it?"

Jock came to life with alacrity . . . about time too, he thought. These slaves were careless this afternoon and not playing the game. He rolled on his back, scattering the leaves in all directions. Roger joined Gillian and they buried him under an avalanche of red and gold, till only a head and waving tail were visible. This childish performance seemed to amuse them so much that he submitted to it, watching every movement with one bright eye, and sneezing a protest when the leaves tickled his nose.

"Let's come and see the ex-hospital," suggested Roger, helping Gillian to her feet, and releasing Jock.

He pricked up his ears and suddenly began to bark, standing in a belligerent attitude on three legs, as though addressing some invisible intruder.

"Hush, old fellow," ordered Perch, picking him up and thrusting him into Gillian's arms. "Just lie low for a moment, Miss Ivery, while I look round."

Dodging behind the old trees on the rise and seeing nothing, he descended the track and took a sharp look round, but the coppice was apparently empty, and he came to the

conclusion Jock had been barking at concerns of his own or even a distant passer-by on the road below. He returned to report all clear and the three set out for the hut. At the far end of the coppice someone made off as soon as his back was turned, smiling triumphantly.

3

The dusky gentleman approached his former residence with caution, but they laughed and reassured him, promising that he should not even enter the door unless he wished. They supposed he remembered it as something of a prison now he was free, but when they reached the door and found the staple had been pulled out and entrance effected, his suspicious attitude to the surroundings seemed yet another sign of brilliance.—The dog was a genius, there could be no doubt of it.

They searched the hut but found no clue to the trespasser, who must have been disappointed not to find a mystery concealed within.

"Thoughtless of us," said Roger. "We ought to have considered the feelings of possible visitors and left a few charred bones or a plan of the buried treasure."

"We did leave something, look," exclaimed Gillian behind the door, and brought out the pad and pencil. "It's blank. Did you tear off the last entry before we left?"

"No! What was it, I wonder?"

Both recalled it at the same moment with a shout of laughter. Roger, after changing Jock's collar, had made a raid on the larder and bribed him to quiet with an enormous meal. He had written on the pad before leaving:

"5 p.m. Ate half a bullock. The Mastiff should have no more solids till morning."

"That will give them something to think about," said Roger joyfully. "Ought to make old Burrows' carrots safe too. If you hear any rumors of a mastiff at Brindlea, mind you encourage them—say he's a savage brute."

"Why, whoever do you think it is?"

"Oh, some local bad egg," said Roger. "Nothing to worry about, but I think you and Jock-Scot had better keep to the gardens except in the early morning, and it might be wiser not to use this short cut. . . . Watch your chance and slip into the drive."

Gillian nodded and they returned to Brindlea, the amateur mastiff limping ahead. He had had enough names and titles thrust upon him during the last few weeks to confuse a lesser dog, as Gillian told him, but he remained calm. Trifles did not worry Jock, but he had still one grief in this heaven to which he had come after perils uncountable. *She* would go away and leave him, and he could not cure her of the habit. It was most distressing.

CHAPTER XIII

He is Basely Libelled as the Terror of the Place

1

PERCH, after Gillian had gone, went thoughtfully in search of Burrows. He had his own views about the visitor to the hut and was glad Gillian had so readily agreed not to use the coppice again. She was reasonable. It pleased him to find yet another perfection in her, but he shut these pleasant thoughts away, fairly certain Burrows had something very much the reverse to offer him.

The gardener was superintending some work at the end of the drive when his master called him away.

"What's your trouble, Burrows? Thieves about?"

"A couple of young hens disappeared in the night, sir . . . that's one hitem."

"Foxes, do you think?"

"Maybe a fox can open a gate and close it after 'im, sir. That run is netted over. Maybe a fox would cut the last of the asparagus too. Must be entertainin' visitors at the West Lodge, if you ask me."

"Oh, come now, Burrows, you don't seriously suggest the tenants at the Lodge would stoop to that."

"*Them?*" said the old man with scorn. "They've nerve enough to pinch your birds and asparagus and ask you to dine off of 'em yourself. The Lodge gives 'em much too clear a run of the place, and short of getting rid of them or engaging a regiment of soljers, we'll never stop it neither."

Roger went indoors to look up the papers about the estate, given him by the family solicitor in London. The rent of the West Lodge was mentioned among the sources of income, but he could find no reference to the length of lease. He wrote to the solicitor the same night for this detail and for any available information about the Bryce-Spencers themselves, giving his reasons vaguely but not in detail.

Towards ten o'clock he strolled down the drive and out along the road bordering the estate to the West Lodge, somewhat amused at his own absurdity, for wasn't this yarn of old Burrows too fantastic? The Bryce-Spencers were certainly undesirable tenants, but he could hardly believe they would rob his hen-roost like any tramp.

The latticed windows of the Lodge showed lamp-light, mellow and golden, behind the drawn curtains. Except for this the country road was dim, and the trees shrouded in mist like a veiled army marching silently. The night was so still he could hear the whisper of the falling

leaves until he came abreast of the Lodge and it was lost in the less gracious sound of human voices and a man's laugh.

The Bryce-Spencers were clearly not alone this evening. But that proved nothing; it might be merely the vicar with them. Perch chuckled at the thought of the vicar dining upon stolen fare; but at this moment two small red lights glowing in the curve of the road came into view—cars waiting—and he strolled past them. One he recognized as Beth Willison's coupé, the other bore a London number plate, and was unfamiliar.

Burrows had been right about the entertaining then? Roger, half-irritated, half-amused, went home, almost convinced he had been right about the rest of it. Tramps or villagers would hardly, he thought, have a palate for asparagus, and the loss of the chickens alone would have been less significant.

He was in Ferris Royale next morning, and seeing Miss Willison pulling Diana-fashion against her dog on his silver leash, spoiled this picture by planting himself firmly in the way.

"It was most unkind of you not to come to my party," he said in a tone of reproach.

This was a better opening than he knew.

"I have so many engagements," said Miss Willison with genteel languor, but she did not move on.

"I don't believe you like me," declared Roger, simu-

lating hurt surprise. "You go and dine at my gates, but cold-shoulder Brindlea in the most pointed manner."

"Really? How do you know where I dine?"

"What else have we to talk of in Ferris Minor but the comings and goings of our one society lady? I hope the chicken and asparagus were good."

She laughed, and the beautiful Alsatian put back his ears, at which Roger Perch began to like him.

"Does Ferris Minor even know what we eat? How touching!"

"Yes, isn't it? But we lead a very circumscribed life, you mustn't blame us. . . . You enjoyed the chickens, I hope?" pleaded Roger.

"Chickens and asparagus are no treat to me," said Miss Willison in a tone of condescending amusement. "I went to the West Lodge to meet Lord William, not for the food. . . . Why don't you house your tenants better, Mr. Perch? It's quite embarrassing to see such nice people in that poor cottage."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Roger blandly. "I agree with you absolutely, Miss Willison. There are going to be many changes, you'll be surprised."

He left her to make what she could of that and drove home, pleased with his own cunning, but by no means pleased with the information she had unwittingly given him. The situation would have been funny if it had not also been distinctly unpleasant. As a newcomer, he had

no desire to make enemies of the pleasant neighbors who all received these people in their homes, but he was determined not to submit to common burglary, if he had to burn the West Lodge to get rid of its tenants.

2

Ever since the dusky gentleman had taken up his quarters at Brindlea, Roger, warned by Gillian's sight of Mrs. Bryce-Spencer in the gardens, had given orders that one or other of the men should be put on work within sight of the West Lodge every day, and told to report to Burrows the instant any member of that household attempted to trespass.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, who had grown accustomed to think the run of the estate one of her privileges, and always filled her vases with Brindlea flowers, was highly indignant when ordered out of the grounds by Burrows, and said she would report him for insolence. It was awkward to have to pick her flowers in the dark; so she sent her maid to make overtures to the workman, who, however, proved deaf.

Roger, determined to keep her off the place, not only because he disliked outsiders spying on his domain, but on account of Gillian's visits to her dog, awaited grimly the promised complaint against old Burrows, but waited in vain.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer saw that the new owner was going to be difficult and that she must proceed with caution. She remembered that their rent was overdue and it would be most inconvenient to antagonize their landlord in the circumstances. Better to bide her time.

3

Jock the Scot added to her doubts of the new owner of Brindlea that night. Roger, inviting him out for a run before bedtime, met with the usual ready assent, for Jock was fond of these evening rambles. The misty garden in the darkness was an enticing and mysterious place, simply full of adventures; the shrubbery was a jungle fit for any lion to prowl in, and every falling leaf an enemy to pursue.

Roger, smoking his pipe, sauntered after the little sportsman at the moment when the tenant of the lodge climbed into her landlord's garden to replenish her flower vases. Jock suddenly became aware of this alien presence and barked in a tone that left no doubt of his indignation. Roger, some distance behind, and far more concerned for the dark gentleman's safety than anything else at the moment, crashed after him, and the combined uproar in the darkness completely broke the trespasser's iron nerve.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, letting the flowers she had gathered drop from her nerveless fingers, fled as though demons

were at her heels and arrived back at the Lodge in a state of collapse.

Suggestion can do much. She had already discovered and taken charge of Perch's memo regarding the mastiff which had eaten half a bullock, and was convinced she had almost fallen a victim to the same voracious monster, if indeed there were not half a dozen of them. The frightened servant, sent post-haste to the inn for spirits, told a harrowing tale of the huge beast as big as a calf which had bounded out of the Brindlea drive and attacked her mistress as she passed.

Roger, meanwhile, accompanied by the monster in question, reached the dividing fence and found the trail of flowers. He picked them up with an impulse to pitch them after the gatherer, but thought better of it and took them back to the house instead. No reason why the poor things should wither before their time. Roger put them in water, thinking of Gillian's light touch and quite unaware of the legend already growing round the dusky gentleman, her love.

The Bryce-Spencers' servant, on an errand in the village next morning, was surrounded by an eager audience, and gave new and juicy details of the outrage. Throughout the day, the legend, from constant repetition, grew, until Brindlea was a place of terror to all but the hardiest spirits.

The lady at the West Lodge had been bitten by an enor-

mous mastiff with red eyes, breathing fire; she would never walk again; she was at death's door.

The new owner of Brindlea had secretly imported a mad dog from South America. No. There were actually six of the brutes and whole bullocks were brought from Ferris Royale to feed them twice a week. Their baying could be heard for miles and the police had already had complaints. The worst and fiercest, known as Lion, had been confined in the hut in the coppice until he grew to such a size that he had to be removed. The beasts were locked up in the cellars by day, but even so, the staff at Brindlea went in fear of their lives. Mr. Perch was to be summonsed by Mr. Bryce-Spencer. It was highly probable he would have to answer a charge for manslaughter.

Gillian, quite unaware of the huge dimensions to which her darling had grown in the space of a few hours, stole out early in the afternoon, but was unable to slip in at the Brindlea drive because of the public interest in that dangerous locality. She had not the heart to disappoint the dark gentleman of his walk, so chanced the coppice as of old and met no one. Ferris Minor might long to visit the notorious Lion's den, but had not the courage, only the feminine portion of the village being at leisure at this hour.

Jock the Scot was on the terrace with Roger and raced to meet her joyfully. While the village libelled him he had been enjoying a bath and a brush-up, and now, very handsome in his fresh suit, he was ready to take his lady out.

"I couldn't come in the other way, so many people were about," she explained breathlessly to Roger, over his head. "I don't know what can be going on."

"Funeral or accident probably," said Roger. "I've been trying to persuade this fellow to use his other leg a bit. See what you can do with him. The wounded one is perfectly healed."

"I wish his fur would grow on it, then he would be quite perfect," said Gillian, kneeling down to examine the patient.

"Fur? He's not a rabbit, you insulting girl."

Jock was obstinate about the leg, however, though they went on their knees to him and endeavored to show him how to use it again. He seemed to prefer to walk on three legs.

"No help for it, I'm afraid," said Roger at last. "We'll have to get his other paw cut, or he'll be lame for life. I'll run in to Ferris Royale in the morning and bring a man over."

"Oh no, he mustn't be hurt again," cried Gillian. "Think what he has suffered already."

Roger explained the process. "The vet would simply cut the pad of his other front leg so that it would be sore for a day or two, and he would get used to walking on the injured one instead. At the same time the expert could look him over, as a clean bill of health would be needed before his introduction to society. And surely you wouldn't like to

have him a cripple? It would be unfair, to a dog of parts," he said.

She gave in at last, on condition no operation was performed except in her presence, and spent the rest of her visit apologizing to the patient for the new pain that was to be inflicted on him.

Jock didn't care; he was in one of his busiest moods and led her importantly about the garden, showing her everything. Roger accompanied them, watching her face and longing to tell her, as Jock seemed to be doing, that Brindlea was hers for the taking.

"I wish I'd got the vet first and told you afterwards," he exclaimed. "You'll be worrying all night."

"Don't you dare!" The lightning flashed at him and he smiled.

"No, I wouldn't dare. That's just the point. Coward is my middle name when you look at me like that."

"You see he's used to me and won't mind so much if I'm here to hold him," she explained anxiously.

"You shall be here. I should feel the same myself."

The meaning of the last phrase escaped Gillian; she thought he meant the same as she felt, not the same as Jock, but she gave him one crumb of comfort.

"I know you are quite as careful. It isn't that. You have been marvellous. I don't know what he would have done without you."

"The pleasure has been all mine," Roger assured her

with due solemnity and saw her laughter come. It was very hard not to kiss her then and there.

When it was time for her to go he strolled down to the gates to see if the coast was clear, and peering villagers took to their heels at his approach. There were some who saw the monster following, but those who had not been vouchsafed this enthralling sight, put it down to boastfulness and words ran high.

Roger at least cleared the road for Gillian and, rather pleased at the sensation his appearance had created, called at the house for Mr. Scot and strolled into the coppice to look that over. Here, too, half a dozen venturesome schoolboys fled for their lives when he came into view.

Meanwhile, the vicar, visiting a sick parishioner, heard that the lady at the West Lodge had been mauled by half a dozen fierce mastiffs which had vaulted the Brindlea wall and sprung upon her, snarling horribly.

Naturally incredulous, he called upon Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, who was far too wise to admit a visitor. The maid's account of the affair was more conservative; the lady had had a serious shock, but no bodily injuries. It had been too dark for her to see the number of her assailants, but that they were utterly ferocious there could be no doubt. Mr. Bryce-Spencer was away in London at the time and had not yet returned. He was expected at any moment.

Mr. Chancellor, more courageous than the village, turned in at the Brindlea drive, thinking he had better see

Perch. It seemed a curious affair. Roger could not be found by the housekeeper, and the vicar did not care to question her about the dog. Meeting Burrows in the garden, however, he said with some hesitation:

"Your master is out, I find, Burrows. Er . . . I am surprised to hear you have dangerous mastiffs at Brindlea."

"Us, vicar?" inquired the old man. "That's a new one to me. We've got no mastiff, though I don't mind telling you I wish we 'ad, and the dangerouser the better."

Poor Mr. Chancellor was now completely nonplussed, for he had known the gardener for years—a thoroughly respectable man. Loyal to the bone, too, and perhaps out of loyalty trying to hide this unfortunate affair. The vicar felt he should not perhaps have questioned the poor fellow, and certainly could not press him further. He went home, greatly disturbed. He did not care to alarm his wife and daughter about the story, and decided to see Perch that evening, but a sick call to an outlying farm defeated this intention. Next morning when he went over to Brindlea, Roger was again absent. He had gone to Ferris Royale for a veterinary surgeon, but the vicar, who did not know this, was almost afraid, though he was sorry to think it, that Perch was evading him. That looked bad, very bad.

After mature consideration, he warned Mrs. Chancellor and Lal to keep away from Brindlea, as there was a rumor about that a savage dog on the place had attacked Mrs. Bryce-Spencer.

"Don't blame him," said Lal in a pleased tone. "Will she go mad, father, I mean madder than she is?"

"Lalage! I am surprised at you. Certainly not."

"Well, Peter says they are bad hats."

"Peter should not say such things to you, and you should not repeat them," said her father. "Speak no evil."

"That's all very well, darling, but you are speaking evil about Roger-Podger's dog."

"There is something in that, my dear," admitted the vicar, too much disturbed to notice her undignified title for the owner of Brindlea. "I confess Perch doesn't seem the kind of young man to keep a savage dog. *Has* he a dog, by the way?"

"Of course he hasn't. If any dog in Ferris attacked her it was probably Beth Willison's Alsatian."

"Yes, that is quite an idea," admitted the vicar. "I shall suggest it to Mrs. Bryce-Spencer at the first opportunity."

CHAPTER XIV

He Undergoes a Minor Operation with Fortitude

1

THE Iverys, with the exception of Gillian, were going to the wedding of a friend on the other side of the county, and left Ferris Minor without having heard the prevailing excitement. Their servants, more exclusive than Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's, did not frequent the village of Ferris Minor to any extent, and the tradesmen who came to the house were from Ferris Royale.

Gillian, since she would be alone, asked for a picnic lunch and ate it with Jock's assistance in the coppice close to Brindlea so that she would hear Roger's car returning with the vet. The free afternoon was a piece of wonderful good fortune, for she would be able to stay with the patient after the operation, instead of rushing away.

"It will be a comfort to you, won't it?" she asked the stocky black gentleman sitting beside her, and Jock, who liked the conversation of his friends, however unnecessary and absurd, wagged his tail.

The veterinary surgeon was engaged during the morn-

ing; so Roger lunched in the town and brought the man back with him directly after. Gillian, hearing them arrive, caught up the patient and went fearfully to meet them.

The vet was a hard-bitten old fellow with merry blue eyes, and he had a way with dogs that the girl found reassuring. Jock never barked at strangers with his friends, he had been taught it was discourteous, but he wore an air of reserve with them, from which he did not always unbend. This man established friendly relations quickly, and having looked over the dusky gentleman's points with a professional eye, said there was not much the matter with *him.*

"Pretty good specimen, eh?" said the vet, running a hand over him in a way he rather liked. "Let's have a look at that leg now . . . pretty good doctor you had too, whoever he is."

He massaged the lame leg gently, and Jock, looking faintly suspicious at first, presently decided to bear it.

"Now, what about standing on it for a change?" Before the patient knew what was happening, the other front paw was in the man's hand and his weak leg on the ground, but he wasn't going to submit to that and struggled away, shaking his coat indignantly.

The vet watched him, smiling.

"Good! That was soon done."

"You don't mean you've cut him already?" exclaimed Gillian, running to her dog.

"That's right, miss. The operation is over and completely successful. They're tough underfoot and he didn't feel it. It will be sore after a bit when he begins running about and then you'll see he'll use the weak one to give it a rest. He'll be running round on all fours as good as new before he's very much older."

"Oh, thank you. I am grateful you didn't hurt him. How —how much do I owe you?" said Gillian eagerly.

"No, no, this is my job," declared Roger. "Why, you can't go and spoil my fun like that. It isn't sporting."

"But I must pay for his operation. . . . I couldn't think of letting you."

The vet was a tactful man.

"Well, miss, I can't rightly tell you the charge till I see what sort of job I've made of it," he assured her. "When you think he's cured, you bring him in to Ferris Royale and let me look him over again, and I'll present my little bill. It would be rooking you proper to make a charge at this stage."

Gillian looked suspiciously from one to the other, but could not detect a smile, so agreed to this arrangement, though she had her doubts. It seemed to her a funny way of doing business.

Roger then asked the vet to pronounce on the general health of the patient, which was found to be excellent, and the two men went indoors for refreshment, to celebrate the fact. Jock invited Gillian to go too, but not being able

to persuade her, came back and suggested a walk in the garden. She followed him down the terrace steps, and he set off briskly at first, but soon the gravel made him pause, and he sat down, shaking the cut paw distressfully. His lady, unable to bear this, picked him up and carried him back to the terrace, which was quite hard enough going for any two-legged dog, she said. When Roger came out to see the veterinary surgeon off, she was sitting on the top step, holding the newly-injured leg and assisting the patient to walk with the other. Jock was submitting more out of kindness than enthusiasm.

2

"Everybody's out, so I can stay with him a little if I'm not in the way," announced Gillian as the vet departed. "I don't think he can be expected to run about much yet, do you?"

"Oh, dear, no. The patient must be kept quiet and he shall give us afternoon tea on the terrace like a Member of Parliament."

"I can't stay as long as that and interrupt your work."

"But I want a half-holiday," protested Roger. "Have a heart . . . unless, of course, *I'm* in the way?"

Seeing her smile, he perched on the balustrade beside her chair, and Jock flung himself down in the sun in a satis-

fied manner—a united family. He liked that. Whenever Gillian moved he opened one eye, however, and lifted his head, because this girl of his needed watching. She went out too much.

It was jolly here, thought Gillian, watching lazily as Roger filled his pipe. He had been very good to Jock the Scot, and that made her feel she had known him forever, or perhaps it was because they were both strangers while all the other people had been at Ferris Minor for years.

"We are all three strangers," she corrected herself, to include the dark gentleman at her feet. There was something rather exciting in that, it gave her a happy feeling of not being quite alone. She had felt, she remembered, until the day of Jock's arrival, simply lost in a strange land.

She asked him how his Brindlea Book was getting on, and he said it was fattening fast. Jock, of course, was giving him a lot of assistance.

"What does he do?"

"Lies on the hearthrug with his heels to the blaze and listens while I burble. He's a great listener. Then we go out for a breath of air and hunt burglars till bed-time. We nearly caught one the other night."

"A real burglar?"

"Real but feeble—pinching flowers near the West Lodge."

They exchanged a glance of understanding.

"What happened?"

"Burglar retired into the Lodge, dropping the booty. I very nearly sent it after her, but was afraid that would be too subtle."

"Yes, much . . . she'd be telling everyone you sent her flowers. . . . It was really true about the carrots then?" exclaimed Gillian.

"She could have all the carrots on the place if she'd keep out of it," said Roger. "I can't stand prowlers. Thank heaven, the West Lodge doesn't overlook the house or we'd have no privacy at all."

Gillian rose and looked over the balustrade, and Jock tumbled to his feet at once; so she lifted him up to sit beside Roger. The little family group turned to gaze towards the pointed roof of the Lodge just visible between the treees.

"Can't you get rid of them?" inquired Gillian.

"That's what I am trying to find out. . . . How would everybody look at it, I wonder? I don't want to begin my career at Brindlea with a reputation for unbridled ferocity, for instance."

"Do you mind what they think?"

"Not intensely." He smiled at her. "But I don't want your uncle and aunt to disapprove of me violently, or Miss Joyce."

"Nobody decent could possibly disapprove of you," she assured him with vigor.

At this inauspicious moment Mrs. Burrows interrupted a promising scene by bringing out the tea-table.

"You didn't notice your post, sir," said the housekeeper. "I don't know whether I'm doing right in bringing it out, seeing as one letter is expressed."

"Oh, thanks, Mrs. Burrows." Roger, excusing himself to Gillian, tore open the note in question, glanced at it and gave a chuckle of triumph. "Talk of the devil," he said. "Jock-Scot, my lad, perhaps it was just as well you didn't eat the burglar. I have a feeling the West Lodge will soon be empty."

3

The solicitors wrote in reply to his inquiry that the lease for the West Lodge had expired during his cousin's last illness. Later, though having his power of attorney, they had not renewed it, but had permitted the Bryce-Spencers to remain as weekly tenants, pending his arrival. This had been mentioned with other matters in handing over the estate, but no doubt, in the press of business, Mr. Perch had not taken it in. The solicitors had not been favorably impressed by Mr. Bryce-Spencer at the one interview which had taken place, and on receipt of their client's letter had set some inquiries on foot. The result was by no means satisfactory. The man received a small pittance from his family, who otherwise refused to recognize his existence;

his associates were dubious, and his name had been removed from several London clubs. They advised that Mr. Perch would be quite within his rights to terminate the tenancy, and they would write Mr. Bryce-Spencer, giving him notice to quit, on receipt of instructions to that effect.

Roger was greatly relieved. His tenants at the lodge had been a source of annoyance and discomfort, and he was determined the place should not be let again. One of the married men on the estate had better move in.

When Gillian had gone home, and Jock the Scot partially consoled for this fresh desertion, he wrote his instructions to the solicitors and sent the note by one of the lads to Ferris Royale to catch the evening mail to London.

A few moments later old Burrows asked to see him, and imparted with deep disgust the first hint of the tale of terror that was exercising Ferris Minor. Burrows despised village gossip and he would have ignored the rumors with scorn if they had not reached him from so many directions. Roger had not given Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's mild burglary and sudden flight away to anyone but Gillian, and he shouted with laughter at the story.

"Yes, sir, I'll lay it's funny, but it's a dirty business too. Why, as early as yesterday I met the Reverend in the drive and he says to me: 'I'm surprised to hear you're keepin' savage mastiffs at Brindlea, Burrows.' 'Us, vicar?' I says. 'I only wish we 'ad a mastiff and the savager the better,' never thinkin' what was behind it. Libel, that's what it

is, sir, and if I was you I'd 'ave the law on those Spencers, common thieves as we know 'em to be."

Roger was more than ever convulsed at the mention of mastiffs, patted the old man on the back and told him not to worry. They wouldn't thieve much longer, and Burrows went off, shaking his head.

" 'E's too young a chap to know the spitefulness of such kittle-kattle," he said to his wife. "But you mind that young man under the table don't go out of your sight, Mother, or they'll be laying for 'im with a pound er poison."

Jock, having a meal in the kitchen, looked out from his lair and wagged a tail at Burrows.

"You get on and leave him be," said Mother comfortably, "you and your mastiffs."

CHAPTER XV

He Has a Word with the Police

1

THE village by this time had acquired a counter rumor to the beasts at Brindlea, for which, all unconscious of the honor, Lal Chancellor was responsible. A lad on an errand to the vicarage told the tale of terror to the housemaid, who had heard her young mistress's spirited remarks on the subject while waiting at table.

"Get along with you," said the girl to the boy, "you've got the story all wrong, sonny. It was that stuck-up great dog of Miss Willison's done the damage. Think we don't know whether they got dogs at Brindlea or not? My ladies was there only Saturday and Wog with them."

A section of the village, disliking Miss Willison and her airs, seized this new theory with gusto, and Ferris Minor was divided into rival camps. To the new faction belonged among others the families and friends to two young adventurers, caught in the coppice by Roger Perch, and first fiercely lifted over the fence, and then given a

shilling and a smile and told to keep out till the dead trees were cut, when they might come back for firewood. This was looked upon as open bribery, however, by those imaginative souls who had not shared the booty and had actually described Mr. Perch's flock of South American hounds, from their fiery nostrils to their lashing tails.

The only thing that troubled the village was that nothing had come of the affray. The Lodge blinds had not been pulled down nor the undertaker summoned; Mr. Perch still remained cheerfully at large. Certainly Miss Willison and her dog had not been seen and might both be in the lock-up at Ferris Royale, some people suggested hopefully. And serve them right too, said the village, recalling Milord's attack on the jolly little pup from the vicarage.

The heroine of the affair meanwhile was having a dull time. Her husband was away in town; with the exception of the vicar, no one had come near her, and for the sake of her own credit, she could not go out for a day or two at least. Unable to see anything of Brindlea from the windows, she ascended into the attic, and this was better. Through a gap in the trees the house was visible, but she needed field-glasses, and these her husband had taken to town. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, being practical, knew it would be a heavy asset if she could actually see the mastiff before describing her adventure by word of mouth. Peering through the attic window, she made out a figure on the terrace, and called her servant, who had better sight. The

girl saw Roger Perch, a young lady and yes—it was a dog.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's heart leapt, until the dog was described as "only a little toy-dog-like, darkish in color, might be Miss Ivery's spaniel." Then she saw it all. Joyce was there of course, with Micky. It was evidently quite a case between Roger Perch and the Ivery girl, and no doubt he kept his brute locked up. Surely the Iverys, so fond of their dogs, could know nothing about it.

She sent the servant with a message forthwith to say she was too prostrated to write, but would be so grateful if Mrs. Ivery could run in and see her.

"The family is out," said the Iverys' housemaid shortly. She and the cook detested Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, and looked down their noses at her domestic. They would have no social chat with such as she. Besides, they had heard whispers of what they called "nice goings-on," and when their mistress returned from the wedding, they repeated them to her discreetly before delivering Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's message. There had been, from all accounts, they said, quite a set-to between Miss Willison and Mrs. Spencer and that great dog of Miss Willison's had bit the lady at the Lodge something awful.

Mrs. Ivery, much shocked, commanded them not to repeat the story and then sought the Colonel. She did not wish to be unkind, but it was really all very unpleasant and in a small community like this one couldn't take sides in people's quarrels. The Colonel agreed with her and said

she was far too fatigued to go out again that evening, which would make an adequate excuse for the moment.

Some hours later Bryce-Spencer returned and hearing of the "outrage" took his gun and said he would slay the mastiff.

Not being a valiant soul this gallant purpose did not take him beyond his own grounds, but to satisfy his wife that he was doing something about it, he fired two shots wildly in the direction of Brindlea and hoped for the best.

Ferris Minor, wakened from its first sleep, was naturally thrilled to the core. The brute had been destroyed then? Next morning rival groups peered into the gardens of Brindlea and The Dene, hoping for a sight of the corpse.

2

In sober daylight subtler methods presented themselves to the tenant of the West Lodge and he set off for the police station at Ferris Royale to lodge a complaint. His story was received with some reserve, for it was altogether too vague to satisfy the police. The lady had not apparently received any bodily harm, no doctor had been called and no clear description of the dog was forthcoming. There had been also various little matters of summonses against these people by local tradesmen from time to time.

However, an investigation was promised, and towards

noon the news spread through Ferris Minor that a sergeant of police had cycled over from the town and turned in at Brindlea. Even the adherents of the Willison theory were a little shaken at this turn of affairs.

Roger was at the moment with Burrows, who had just discovered one of his glass frames in the lower garden shattered and a bullet lodged in a piece of wood inside it. Both men had heard the shot late the night before, but taken little notice except to wonder what lunatic was out shooting at such an hour. Burrows was now trying to persuade his master to take this precious tale of the mastiff seriously, and the arrival of the police-sergeant seemed to him a miracle. It was about time, said Burrows darkly, those Bryce-Spencers were under lock and key.

"Good morning, officer, what can I do for you?" said Roger to the sergeant, who was waiting for him in the library.

"Well, sir, I've been sent over from Ferris Royale on a little matter of a complaint we've had against a savage dog on your place."

Roger smiled incredulously.

"Someone must have been seeing double, sergeant. What exactly is the story?"

The policeman turned up his notes.

"On the evening of the 18th instant, Mrs. Bryce-Spencer was passing Brindlea drive when one or more large dogs, which she believes to be mastiffs, sprang out and attacked

her. She ran for her life and reached the West Lodge in a state of collapse. No bodily injury, but suffering from shock. Too upset to notice number of assailants. Unable to describe dogs, but gives the name of one as Lion."

"Splendid! This mysterious mastiff was able to tell her his name too? A remarkable beast. I should like to meet him."

The sergeant laughed.

"That certainly is a point, if you don't possess a dog of the name, Mr. Perch?"

"Never heard it before in my life," Roger assured him.

"Am I to understand, sir, you have no mastiffs nor other large dogs at Brindlea?"

"Absolutely. It is a piece of imaginative fiction." Roger walked to the library door opening into the garden at the back of the house and whistled. In a moment a black streak shot into view, paused at the door to lift first one front paw and then the other, and then limped into the room, wagged his tail at Roger, and cautiously examined the visitor.

"There's our only savage mastiff, sergeant. Dangerous brute, isn't he? Dead dog, Jock, old lad!"

Jock the Scot lay stiff at their feet in an instant. The sergeant was delighted and the corpse, ordered to come to life again, sat up and permitted the law to make friends.

"He's had an abscess on his leg and I've been doctoring him for a friend. He doesn't belong to me, alas, but he's the

only dog on the place, as my gardener Burrows will tell you. Jenks, the vet at Ferris Royale, can give you a satisfactory account of this fellow."

"Him? He's safe enough—a fine little chap," said the policeman. "I know something of this breed. You'd raise a fine laugh if you was summonsed as a dangerous mastiff, wouldn't you, my lad? I don't mind telling you, sir, we was a bit suspicious of the tale at the station. They haven't a grudge against you, I suppose—these gentry at the Lodge?"

"No, I don't think so. They may feel they have one in a day or two, however. Between ourselves, sergeant, I am giving them notice to go."

"Indeed, sir? Reasons being private, no doubt?"

"Not at all. I want the Lodge for one of my men on the estate. I am making alterations and shall need to reopen the drive from that end. It's a greater protection to the place too. We've had a certain amount of petty thieving and, by the way, now you are here, you might come and look at our latest discovery. Burrows associates it with this mastiff story, which seems to have got round the village."

Jock was persuaded to return to his own garden, and Roger led the sergeant to the scene of last night's shooting. Burrows' elation at this was distinctly damped when his master refused to lay any information against the shooter. He did agree, however, to a suggestion that a policeman should be sent over to keep an eye on the place

after dark for the next few nights, and the sergeant, having repaired to the house for refreshment, cycled down the drive.

"Now then," he cried to the cluster of villagers at the gate, "what's all this? Get about your business, all of you."

"Is 'e dead, mister?" asked a hoarse voice.

"Dead? Who's dead?"

"The awful great mastiff what bit the lady."

"There's no such dog," said the sergeant briefly. "Clear out now and let me get to my work if you've none of your own."

"See! Didn't I tell yer it was that great dog of Willisons'?" shouted someone triumphantly. "Mr. Policeman, you've gorn to the wrong 'ouse."

The sergeant, however, had mounted his bicycle and was off and the crowd melted back towards the village, disappointed.

3

Beth Willison had returned that morning from a visit to friends in Hampshire, Milord for once having been left at home. To console him, she ordered out her little coupé, had the top put down, and took the handsome creature for a drive, his one joy in a somewhat dull existence. The returning villagers met the pair, and those who believed the Alsatian to be the villain of the piece and already de-

stroyed, were highly indignant. Two stones were flung at him; one hit the side of the car and the other went wide, but when Miss Willison pulled up with very natural fury, the villagers scattered to their homes.

The girl drove on, her eyes blazing and, overtaking the sergeant on his bicycle, stopped and signalled to him peremptorily.

"Those people in Ferris Minor need a lesson," she said, glaring. "They have just flung stones at my car."

"Indeed, miss, what's the trouble?" inquired the policeman, with an interested eye on Milord.

"Trouble?" snapped the girl. "Isn't it trouble enough that the residents should be attacked by a lot of hooligans? What are you police doing? This valuable dog might have been injured. Perhaps you don't know who I am. I am Miss Willison from The Dene."

"Oh, you are Miss Willison?" repeated the sergeant, brightening. "They're liable to be savage, them Alsatian dogs. May I ask if you've had any trouble with him . . . might it be that they was throwing stones at the dog, for instance?"

"Certainly not! I don't know what you mean, he's perfectly harmless and friendly. Everybody in Ferris Minor knows the dog. He's about the only dog of any note in the place, with the exception of a few lap-dogs," declared his owner haughtily.

"The only large dog, is he?"

"Absolutely."

"Ah," said the sergeant, as one seeing light, "then perhaps he's the very dog I'm looking for."

"What do you mean?"

"There's been a bit of trouble with some large dog in Ferris Minor," declared the sergeant. "According to information received, the lady from the Lodge at Brindlea back there was set on two nights ago by a large and savage brute —or that's her story."

"Does she dare to suggest it was this dog?" cried Beth, beside herself with rage.

"No dog specified, miss, but she made a good deal of the size, I don't mind telling you."

"The woman's lying. I never heard of anything so outrageous. She knows perfectly well this is the only dog of any size for miles."

"Ah, now that's interesting," said the sergeant, making a note. "You can account for your dog's movements that evening perhaps, Miss Willison?"

"Certainly," said Beth, forgetting in her excitement that she had been away from home.

"Good! I don't say you'll hear more of the matter and I don't say you won't, but I'd keep him under your own eye, if I was you. I can't deny if it came to a summons that dog would stand a poorer chance than most. The breed has got a reputation for being fierce just lately. Pity if he had to be destroyed."

The sergeant saluted and rode on.

Beth, between rage and fear, turned the car and drove home at top speed.

Her first impulse was to stop at the Lodge and ask Mrs. Bryce-Spencer what she meant by it, but she recalled in time that she had been away and really knew nothing of the dog's movements on the evening in question. When nobody at home seemed able to enlighten her, she was in such terror for her favorite's life that it was decided she had better take him out of the neighborhood.

Taking the closed car and avoiding both Ferris Minor and Ferris Royale, she, her mother and Milord left for Brighton the same afternoon, her father promising to telephone if further developments arose.

CHAPTER XVI

He is Kept in Seclusion

1

ROGER did not tell Gillian of the policeman's call or the tale of the mastiffs, for he did not want to alarm her regarding the safety of the dark gentleman. He did, however, seize her when she appeared that afternoon and advise the back gardens as the setting for their expeditions at present. Some fools had been shooting about the place and accidents might happen. It was no use running risks. He had also prescribed the lawns at the back as a better spot for a fellow with two lame legs rather than the gravelly front, he said, and the patient agreed with him.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer spied this encounter from the attic, but by the time the field-glasses were focussed successfully, Gillian and her Jock were safely out of sight, with the squealy ball in hand, to make the back lawn a more exciting spot for a gentleman already somewhat bored with it.

Roger joined the game from time to time, and having

quite a talent for growling and meowing, he was the life of the party.

"I'm glad he's enjoying himself," said Gillian, "because I shall have to run in a minute. Mrs. Chancellor and Lal are coming over to hear about the wedding."

"Our wedding?" ventured Roger with a beaming smile, and was somewhat dashed by her ready laughter.

"The wedding they went to yesterday . . . to give Lal some ideas for her own frock."

Mrs. Burrows came hurrying out.

"Colonel Ivery is here, sir."

Gillian dropped suddenly behind a shrub, drawing the dark gentleman after her and looking at Roger with consternation.

"However shall I get away?"

"Don't worry, I'll lure him down to look at the glasshouses and send you word when the coast is clear. Mrs. Burrows will guard the old lame lion and you had better chance the coppice," said Roger. When half-way to the house, he ran back to say to her: "You are not to worry about the shooting. We are not letting him go into the danger zone or out of our sight."

"Well, don't you go into it either," said Gillian eagerly.

Roger continued the journey to his visitor, treading on air.

The Colonel had merely come in with some books he had

promised Roger, but was delighted to go and look through the glass-houses and hear the young man's plans for improving Brindlea.

"By the way, Colonel," said Roger with some hesitation, "I have decided to put the West Lodge into use again and as the lease is up the Bryce-Spencers will have to get out. I suppose that won't be considered too arbitrary, will it?"

Colonel Ivery, remembering his wife's disclosures of the night before, said:

"Certainly not, my dear fellow. You must study the needs of the estate, of course."

He was actually relieved, for the Bryce-Spencers had always been something of a problem and if they were going to quarrel with their neighbors, it would be distinctly uncomfortable for everybody. He said no more, for he was averse to repeating gossip, but presently, with the greatest cordiality, he invited Roger to go back with him to tea.

Roger accepted with pleasure, but found time to warn Mrs. Burrows to give Jock the Scot a good fire in the library to console him for this desertion.

"Put the screen round him in case of window-gazers," further suggested Roger. "I'd hate our famous mastiff to catch a chill."

"The great boy," said the housekeeper confidentially to the dog of the house, as her master departed.

2

"The great boy" was received with enthusiasm by Mrs. Ivery, who had just finished confiding the story of the regrettable affair between Mrs. Bryce-Spencer and Miss Willison to Mrs. Chancellor. The vicar had been called away to a diocesan meeting that morning and had not therefore found an opportunity to see Mrs. Bryce-Spencer again, and his wife, always a little slow of understanding, did not see her innocent daughter's hand in the rumor, or remember enough of the original story to disentangle it for Mrs. Ivery's benefit.

The three girls, deep in the discussion of wedding-dresses, had heard nothing of the hushed conversation of the elder ladies, and Lal had forgotten the silly tale of mad dogs at Brindlea in the more pressing matter of her trousseau, which now filled all her waking hours.

Having greeted Roger, she returned to the subject in hand.

"You know, Joyce, I think I'll have mine frilly after all. . . ."

"No, no," said Roger, invading the group. "Now you listen to me. I'm a whale on weddings and Wog would look a sight in frills. The dog's dress shall be my affair. I'll design it for you right away."

Howls of mirth proceeded from the corner of the draw-

Chinko pushed Micky jealously first out of one comfortable chair and then another. (Page 35)

ing-room, as Wog was called up and examined for inspiration.

"Good looking chap," pronounced Roger, "and certainly one of the lads. He has a swagger but it's not a military swagger, I think. . . . I've got it. The Navy! Wog must have a cocked hat for the wedding. It is essential."

He demanded a newspaper and folded it into a cocked hat forthwith. Wog, very much astonished, wore it for a moment and then shook his head. The cocked hat then sat awry over one ear, a ticklish business, so with a swipe of his paw he sent it flying. Racing after it with growls of infant joy, he was about to tear it to atoms, but Lal called him sternly, and he picked it up instead, bringing it back to her feet with an air of virtue as though this were what he had intended to do all along.

Micky, the next candidate for the designer's attention, was pronounced to be a poet of the old school—one of the long-haired kind. He should wear a stock and spats and glasses slung on a black ribbon, said Roger firmly.

Chinko was clearly an ex-king, a Knight of the Garter and a Chevalier of this and that. A broad blue ribbon across his chest and a few stars and orders would be Chinko's costume.

Roger, drawing sketches of the three dogs in their wedding array, caught Gillian's eye and smiled at her reassuringly, sure she was thinking of another fellow, who might or might not be there.

"What this wedding needs is a gentleman of consequence," he said, and under his hand there grew a portrait of Jock the Scot in a top hat with a gardenia in his coat.

"Who's that?" inquired Joyce in her gruff way.

"The best man, of course," said Roger. "Where are your eyes, girl?"

It was a childish and hilarious afternoon, and Roger described it solemnly during dinner to Jock, who always had a chair and sat up at table, watching his friend with alert, bright eyes. Offered a share from time to time, he ate it politely, but his manners were excellent and he never asked.

He knew by this time all the tones of the man's voice and responded in his own fashion. When Roger talked to him confidentially, he showed his appreciation by wag-

ging his tail and blinking his eyes in a wise manner. If Roger spoke sharply to anyone, a pair of black ears shot up and a warrior stood ready to enforce order if required.

Where Micky followed wistfully after his friends or leaned against them, Jock walked beside or before, briskly and full of independence and sat with them as an equal. He was not a clinging dog. He was fond of the library and each evening after dinner led the way there, settling himself down on the rug before the fire with an air of satisfaction.

That night Gillian, lying awake and smiling into the darkness, thought of this library, into which Mrs. Burrows had taken her one day to see Jock's sleeping basket. It was a dim old booky room, smelling of ancient leather and tobacco, and the housekeeper had shaken her head over the litter of papers on the desk which it was as much as her life was worth even to dust, she said. The Brindlea Book! Gillian pictured a dusky gentleman lying with his heels to the blaze and Roger discussing the book with him, then stopping to meow for his guest's entertainment.

"The idiot!" she thought happily. She was afraid Jock would miss Brindlea, and though she longed for the moment when she could have him here, she dreaded it too. She was almost glad he was only convalescent yet and firmly believed this was entirely on Jock's account. Why else?

3

At the West Lodge the evening had been stormy. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer could not understand Mrs. Ivery's neglect of her message and worried her lord to go over there on some pretext. He however refused and said she had probably offended them and ought to have had more sense. Why hadn't she kept in with their landlord too? She knew how important it was. If Perch took it into his head to have a brute of a dog, she should have made friends with it or put down poison on the quiet instead of making all this fuss. She knew very well the people in this neighborhood were all dog-mad and now no doubt were siding with Perch.

The sight of a policeman patrolling the road cheered them a little, but when questioned as to whether he had yet seen the mastiff, he denied any knowledge of such a beast and refused curtly to say why he was there.

Altogether an unsatisfactory evening.

4

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, unable to tolerate the house any longer, arose early next morning and went for a brisk walk in the upper woods at an hour when there was little danger of meeting any of the other residents. Returning towards

eight o'clock, she came face to face with Gillian climbing out of the coppice near the Iverys' gate.

Both were disconcerted.

"My dear, how are you?" said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, showing teeth. "What an early riser, and trespassing too! I'm surprised at such daring, but perhaps the Iverys are specially privileged, not being a mere tenant like poor me."

Gillian, rallying her wits and feeling a hypocrite, said:

"Oh, I don't think so. Is it private in there?"

"Yes, and dangerous . . . those old trees. Dear Mr. Perch, he got into quite a state when I ventured there one day. I wonder he hasn't warned you. Your cousin will have been warned, we may be sure."

Gillian, not in the least understanding this coy reference to Joyce, said hastily:

"I'm afraid I must run, or I shall be late for breakfast."

"Well, ta-ta, and do ask auntie to come in and see poor little me. I've been quite unable to get out after this dreadful shock. . . ."

Gillian was half-way through the gate by this time.

"I'll tell her," she said over her shoulder. "Good-by."

The shock, she supposed, was the notice to leave the West Lodge. Roger must have told them to go, and though it was a good thing and they were funny people, it was pretty awful for them perhaps. She felt a faint pang of sympathy.

She delivered Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's message to her aunt at breakfast, cautiously however.

"She wants you to go and see her. She said she hadn't been able to get out because of some shock. I didn't wait to ask what."

"No, dear, quite right," said Mrs. Ivery with decision. "A curious woman! I shouldn't have too much to say to her."

Gillian gazed at her aunt in pleased astonishment.

CHAPTER XVII

His Life is Threatened in his Lady's Hearing

1

THE notice from Perch's solicitors arrived that morning and was a shock indeed. The tenants had relied upon renewing their lease as soon as they found it convenient to pay the rent already some months overdue, and now concluded this little matter of a few pounds was at the back of the letter. Very likely this lawyer fellow had taken the thing on himself because his demands for the rent had been disregarded.

Mr. Bryce-Spencer regretted now that he had gone to the police about the dog. It made things rather awkward, but he was convinced he could soothe Perch's wrath with a little tact, and reassure him about the money.

This letter from the solicitor was merely a piece of legal bluff.

So thought Bryce-Spencer, setting out to see Perch. This proved difficult, however, and was not actually accomplished until the afternoon.

The tenant took a jocular tone, produced the letter from

that ass of a feller, the lawyer, and assured Roger his money was perfectly safe.

"I'll pay it up in a day or two, old boy. My supplies are a bit late, but there's nothing to worry about."

Roger drily relieved his mind on that score. He was not concerned about his money, but he meant to put the West Lodge into use again.

Mr. Bryce-Spencer ridiculed this idea, said in effect that a beggarly estate like Brindlea couldn't run two lodges. Perch was new to this life but he could take it from him, he would be the laughing-stock of the county.

Roger cheerfully suggested that was his business.

Kindness having no effect, the tenant tried threats. He had influential friends who would make things damned unpleasant for Perch . . . chucking good tenants out into the road at a moment's notice. . . . He would take the matter into Court. . . . He had been promised a renewal of the lease and the law would see that he got his rights. And there was another thing. . . .

Bryce-Spencer, suddenly recalling the disgraceful assault upon his wife by Perch's savage dog or dogs, became eloquent upon the subject of British justice and the penalties that would be inflicted upon Perch before he was very much older.

Roger, keeping his temper with difficulty, said the animal had no existence and the assault was a myth; and mentioned some of the reasons why it would be inadvisable

for Mr. Bryce-Spencer to appeal to British justice. After all, libel, trespass and petty larceny might be difficult to explain.

"I'm willing to forego the rent due if the West Lodge is vacated a week from to-day," finished Roger shortly, "not otherwise."

The rest of the interview was chiefly bluster by the tenant, who at length departed only because his landlord mentioned a constable patrolling the place was interested in the owner of a certain gun. He might be glad to meet Mr. Bryce-Spencer and assist him off the place if he felt unable to walk.

2

Gillian, arriving to visit Jock the Scot a few moments later, proved the very antidote Roger needed. He ran down to meet her and piloted her up the terrace steps impetuously.

"Come on. Let's play bears," he said. "I've been interviewing a shark and I never did like fish."

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer was watching hopefully at the attic window for a sight of her lord in amiable converse with Perch, as a sign that all was well. She had not seen his abrupt departure by the library door, but she now saw Gillian's arrival and this time with the glasses in focus. She was puzzled at first, for why was it Gillian and

not Joyce? and she called the maid to verify the girl's identity.

"Yes, I know, m'm. That's the same young lady we seen before and she was there this morning ever so early. I popped up while you was out walking, to take a look for that brute of a dog and I seen her plain. I meant to tell you but the master was in such a way when you came in I clean forgot. Half past seven it must a' been."

"*Aha!*" said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, remembering the meeting at the edge of the coppice.

The arrival of the master, still in "such a way" or more so and in no mood to listen to anybody or anything, shelved the matter for the time being.

He abused Perch and then his wife, who ought to have had the sense to keep on the right side of their landlord, he said furiously. And now there was nothing for it but to pack up and go.

Mrs. Bryce-Spencer had more spirit. Was nothing to be done then about this disgraceful assault upon her by Perch's vicious hounds? Was he going to sit down meekly while his wife was attacked by brutes that were a danger to the community? What were the police doing? Had he or had he not reported the assault? As to the lease, was he too stupid even to get a lawyer's opinion on the matter? Perch would soon climb down about the lease if he got a lawyer's letter threatening proceedings against him for harboring ferocious dogs at Brindlea.

Perch had denied the existence of the dogs.

Then he was telling lies.

Since she stuck to her story, Mr. Bryce-Spencer once more girded himself for the fray and went to see the police and consult a solicitor.

He returned very late for dinner and snarling quite as ferociously as the mastiffs of legend. The police were satisfied there were no dogs at Brindlea; the solicitors said they had not a leg to stand on.

3

Since they were to leave the Lodge Mrs. Bryce-Spencer was at least determined it should be with colors flying. The police were a disgrace, she said. They must have been bribed, but she would take the initiative and tell her story first.

She saw now that the discovery about Gillian Ivery had been exactly what she needed, for this would show Roger Perch to Mrs. Ivery in his true character. When she had had her say their precious landlord would be extremely unpopular in that quarter.

She decided to lose no time and set off after dinner, walking with the aid of a stick to give color to her weak and overwrought condition.

She bore Gillian no grudge and wished her no harm.

That side of the affair did not enter her head. Moving from one shabby subterfuge to another, she still had pride of a sort and she was determined to make it appear in Ferris Minor that they had given notice to Perch and not vice versa.

Mrs. Ivery was at the hall door, speaking to a pensioner from the village; so she could not evade Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, but she led the visitor into the drawing-room, glad that the girls were elsewhere. Joyce was with her father, fussing over his collection; Gillian no doubt was with Joyce.

"Dear Mrs. Ivery, I felt I must come and see you, though I can barely crawl," declared Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, sinking stiffly into a chair. "When this dreadful affair occurred I sent round to you at once, but I'm afraid my message must have miscarried."

Her eyes roamed round the room as though seeking the lost message, and Mrs. Ivery wished she would lower her voice. Really, this was most uncomfortable.

"I had no notion you were unwell," she said quite truly. "I did get a message that you had asked for me, but I was so fatigued the Colonel would not hear of my going out again that evening."

"Of course. . . . He was perfectly right, but what I came to tell you is that we are going. . . . We have given Perch notice. . . . We can stand no more of it."

Mrs. Ivery, glad to have avoided the more uncomfort-

able topic of the Willison affray and trying to look as astonished as possible, said:

"Well, I suppose the place is rather small and uncomfortable for you."

"Oh, it has nothing to do with the place, though it's poor enough, I'll wager. It's the man himself, a dreadful creature, keeping those great brutes of dogs and setting them to fly at people. Why, it's a public scandal, Mrs. Ivery."

"You can't mean Mr. Perch?" exclaimed her hostess, naturally bewildered.

"Yes, Perch. I was perfectly sure *you* could know nothing of it. A great brute of a dog flew at me three nights ago out of the drive as I passed . . . a most terrifying experience. I had to run for my life. . . . Of course, there's going to be a case about it. The police are watching Brindlea now. Perch will be shown up and the beast destroyed. Do you wonder we go?"

"You must be mistaken," said Mrs. Ivery, who thought the foolish woman was endeavoring in this way to conceal the disgraceful affair of Beth Willison and her Alsatian.

"Ah, he has easily deceived *you*, Mrs. Ivery. You are too kind to people, and I must say I think it unwise of you to let that young niece of yours go running over to Brindlea morning, noon and night," sighed Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, playing her trump card.

"How dare you suggest such a thing!" cried her hostess,

rising in wrath to ring the bell. The visitor put up a hand.

"Wait! She was there soon after seven this morning—a curious hour, you must admit. She was there this afternoon. I've seen her there constantly and wandering with the man in that coppice between here and Brindlea. If you don't believe me, call her in and ask her."

Mrs. Ivery, shaking with anger and not believing the story for a moment, rang the bell.

"Ask Miss Gillian to come here a moment," she said to the maid.

4

Gillian, running downstairs some moments before, had paused outside the drawing-room door at the sound of the visitor's all-too-ringing voice. She had been just about to retreat in search of Joyce, when Mrs. Bryce-Spencer's words pierced her consciousness, and she stood still, paralyzed with fright.

"A great brute of a dog flew at me three nights ago . . . there is going to be a case about it. The police are watching Brindlea now. Perch will be shown up and the beast destroyed."

Her dog. Her darling Jock-the-Scot. He and Roger had chased the woman when she was stealing flowers. Gillian remembered it with a sinking heart. And now they were

going to prosecute Roger and lie and lie, and her dog would have to be destroyed.

Gillian crept into the dining-room because she felt too weak to stand. They shouldn't have him; they should never find him; he should never be destroyed. Roger should not be shown up.

When at last they discovered her and sent her to Mrs. Ivery in the drawing-room, she was still pale, but valiant. She'd fight the lot of them.

"Gillian, my dear," said her aunt kindly, "Mrs. Bryce-Spencer has come to me with a curious story. I know, of course, it is quite untrue, but as it concerns you, it seems only fair you should hear it and tell her so yourself. She says you have been constantly running over to Brindlea at seven o'clock in the morning among other preposterous hours, and walking about the country with Mr. Perch."

"Look at her guilty face, dear Mrs. Ivery. You see she can't deny it. I met her coming away this morning. I saw her there this afternoon. She was there with him two days ago. She was in the coppice with him last week. No wonder he warned other people out of his precious coppice."

"Gillian . . . speak, child."

"I have been to Brindlea certainly. That's quite true."

"*Gillian!*"

"There, you see. The girl is not to blame. She has been led away."

"I have been nothing of the kind," cried Gillian, her

eyes blazing. "I have gone of my own free will and for reasons that are my own concern. It is not a crime to go to Brindlea."

"A little odd, though, at seven in the morning," said Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, showing her teeth.

Mrs. Ivery opened the door.

"Run away, Gillian. I'll speak to you later," she said. Then she rang the bell.

"You will excuse me if I ask you to go," she said with dignity. "Your disclosure amazes me, but your conversation is not quite suitable for young girls, however foolish. Good evening."

CHAPTER XVIII

She Decides to Run Away with Him to Safety

1

GILLIAN, Gillian, how could you have behaved in such a mad, deceitful way?" cried Mrs. Ivery on the verge of tears. "What is the meaning of it? You are not a baby. You know better than to behave like that."

"I haven't done any harm, Aunt Helen."

"Harm? Isn't it harm enough that you should give people an opportunity to talk about you like that! Isn't it harm to run after a young man you hardly know and disgrace us all? Is that your idea of decent behavior and gratitude to your uncle for bringing you here?"

"I didn't run after him," declared Gillian indignantly. "Why, half the time I've been to Brindlea I haven't even seen him!"

"Then why did you go there? At such hours too. You must have had some reason."

Gillian's heart jumped, for she was in a quandary and how could she explain? She was determined not to breathe a word about her dog because of this awful case, but to get him away out of sight at the very first chance. There was nothing she could say. They must think what they chose.

"Well, Gillian, are you going to answer me?"

"I'm sorry if you think I have disgraced you, but it isn't true," said the girl in a low voice.

"I am afraid you don't understand English ways," said her aunt drily. "Your foreign up-bringing is no doubt responsible, but you had better learn once and for all that young ladies do not visit bachelor establishments alone in this country, without occasioning talk and scandal. I could not have believed you would be so sly. I am amazed. . . . You may go. . . . I have nothing more to say."

Gillian turned and fled, out of the drawing-room, up the stairs, past Joyce who was coming down, and into her own room, locking the door behind her.

She didn't care what they said or what they believed. She was sorry, for they had been good to her, but it could not be helped. She could only think of her dog. Nobody should destroy her poor lame Jock-the-Scot. . . . She must get him away quickly to-morrow morning, the very first thing, before any prowling policeman discovered he was there.

2

Joyce, utterly confounded by her cousin's white face and rush past her, stared blankly, heard the locking of the door, and then ran down in a fright to see what it was all about. She could hear her father and mother talking in low tones and she burst in upon them, crying:

"Whatever is the matter with Gillian?"

Mrs. Ivery gazed at her daughter and suddenly burst into tears.

"My poor Joyce!" she wept.

"Why am I poor?" asked Joyce suspiciously. "What on earth's the matter? . . . Father, for heaven's sake tell me."

"Your mother is upset, child. Mrs. Bryce-Spencer has been here with a mischievous story."

"That naughty Gillian," sobbed Mrs. Ivery, "she has been running over to Brindlea day after day, secretly, at all hours. It's her foreign bringing-up. We might have known. . . . But you mustn't mind, my poor darling, or blame Roger. What is any young man to do if a girl flings herself at his head? I am sure he cares nothing for her."

"*Mother!*" cried Joyce, almost stamping her foot. "Will you stop poor-Joycing me! Suppose he does care for her? You don't imagine *I* mind. I'd be jolly glad, as a matter of fact."

"My darling, but he has been so attentive to you. *Everyone* has noticed it, and I did hope——" Mrs. Ivery trailed into sobs again. "That shameless girl. . . . Really, I can hardly believe my senses."

"I daresay she didn't mean any harm. After all, she's very young, you know, Helen," said the Colonel soothingly.

Joyce looked from one to the other with an exasperated face.

"You talk as though she had committed a murder," she said. "Suppose she did go over to Brindlea sometimes? Suppose she threw herself at his head even—though I've seen no signs of it—is it any worse than your throwing *me* at his head?"

"*Joyce!*"

At sight of her mother's face Joyce smiled for the first time.

"Well, you did really. I know you don't realize it, but you've been throwing me and throwing me until my blood simply curdled. And I wouldn't marry Roger Perch if he was the last man left on earth."

"But, my darling, I thought you seemed to like him so much. You amaze me," faltered Mrs. Ivery.

"He's all right as a friend. But can't you see I don't want my husband picked out and shoved at me by other people? I should be simply miserable married to him. I'd never know what to say, I'd feel an ass," exclaimed Joyce ex-

citedly. "You don't want me to marry someone I don't care for?"

"Of course we don't, my dear," exclaimed the Colonel. "Your mother would never dream of such a thing."

"*You* didn't," said Joyce gruffly to her mother. "You chose father and he chose you, and I'll bet you went and saw each other when you got a chance."

"That was a very different matter," exclaimed her mother with dignity. "I certainly didn't go and visit your father secretly at seven o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, mother, what a tale! I suppose he met her by accident one day and took her there to show her something. I don't blame him either. What is a man to do if he likes a girl, or a girl if she likes a man in this place? People can't get to know each other and fall in love by saying how do you do and good-bye with a whole crowd of family looking on. Peter and Lal didn't. . . . They'd been meeting secretly morning, noon and night for a year, and now I've given them away, but Lal won't care. It's no good pretending you and father did either, for I don't believe it. . . . Gillian hasn't done anything awful. . . . And I should have thought you'd like to have her married at Brindlea, I know I should. It would be somewhere to go. . . . It would be fun for me . . . somewhere to meet people. I don't get so many chances," cried Joyce urgently.

"There is something in that," said the Colonel, who was surprised and pleased at the unexpected spirit of his daugh-

ter. "Perch is a good fellow, and the woman is a scandal-mongering fool who will soon be out of the district fortunately. Gillian may have been reckless and unconventional, but we must expect these young people to manage their own affairs, Helen. As Joyce remarks, we did it ourselves."

The two elders exchanged an understanding smile, and Mrs. Ivery dried her tears. After all, since Joyce was so much against marrying Roger Perch, why not Gillian?

"I didn't mean to be hard on the child," she said, "but that dreadful woman has upset me thoroughly."

"Then it's all right?" cried Joyce eagerly. "I may tell her it's all right, mother?"

"Yes, do, dear. She may be worrying a little," said her mother. "I'll have a quiet talk with her in the morning and advise her to be more discreet."

Joyce shot up the stairs and knocked at Gillian's door, but there was no answer. She knocked again. Silence. She tried the door gently but it was locked.

"Gillian! . . . I say, Gill, old thing, it's all right. . . . Gillian!"

3

Gillian heard the knock and hastily covered her head with the bed-clothes, for she dared not let anyone in, even Joyce, to see her preparations or guess what she

was going to do. She had counted her money anxiously . . . £4. 11. 0. She had had to spend nothing since Jock's removal to Brindlea, and now Roger Perch was having to suffer for what he had done for her dog. But as long as she could get the dark gentleman away before the police found him, there would be no trace of any dog at Brindlea, and the prosecution would fall through. And she must get him away! No one in this world was going to destroy Jock while she was alive to prevent it. To-morrow morning she must be at Brindlea as soon as it was light. She thought they opened the side door about seven, but she was not sure—in spite of Mrs. Bryce-Spencer, she had never been there so early as that. Directly she could get him she must hide him under her coat and go off to Ferris Royale and catch the first train for London. How long would £4. 11. 0 keep them? Gillian, unused to English money, put it into francs, and thought they could live carefully for weeks on that. She had a little jewellery to sell and two small pictures of her father's, which she loved and did not want to part with. She would have liked to leave one for Roger because of his goodness to her dog, but as they thought she was running after him, perhaps it was better not. She had put them in her little case with pyjamas and toothbrush, for she could not carry much. The dark gentleman would be heavy, and she would not dare to risk letting him walk and be seen.

She would telegraph from London that she was safe, but

nothing more. When all her money was gone, and the case against Roger safely over, she would write to her uncle and ask him to let her have her father's legacy to live on and train for a job. They wouldn't want her here again as they thought she had disgraced them. . . . She supposed it did look funny, though it had never occurred to her before. . . . It hadn't been Roger she was running after, but another fellow, and she could not tell them that.

She would never see Brindlea again, or Roger Perch. Jock would miss him horribly, and the gardens and the fire where he could lie with his heels to the blaze, and the little coppice where he loved to burrow under the red leaves. Gillian buried her face in the pillow, sick at heart for all the delights that Jock would never see again.

In the next room Joyce lay worrying over the locked door and Gillian's silence, for what, oh what had her mother said? Joyce knew what she suspected . . . her mother had probably said, "Oh, my poor Joyce!" and made Gillian believe she had stolen Roger away from her.

Gillian was pretty quick and, naturally, if they accused her of that she would be horrified and do something about it. Here she was dependent on them and probably feeling quite rotten enough without anything else. Joyce wasn't blind, and she knew how homesick and strange Gillian had felt, if no one else did. It stood to reason, thrown among strangers, all alone. And the worst of it was she'd

believe this awful nonsense. . . . If she and Roger really were in love she might even tell him. . . .

"Nice that would be for me," muttered Joyce to herself, scarlet at the thought.

If they weren't in love but only on the way to it, Gillian would probably avoid Roger because she thought her cousin wanted him. Joyce wasn't going to have that either. The very first thing in the morning, she would worm the whole of her mother's remarks out of Gillian, and if there had been even a vague hint, laugh it to scorn.

She felt more satisfied when she had come to this decision, and went to sleep thinking of Gillian married at Brindlea. To Micky, stirring at her feet, she said sleepily:

"You can still be half her dog if you want to, though. We'll go there quite a lot."

CHAPTER XIX

They Run, but Somebody Runs Faster, and He Returns to Become Lord of Brindlea

1

JOYCE always heard Gillian get up in the morning and go out for her walk; then she turned over and went to sleep again. Early rising was no hobby of hers.

This morning, however, when she awoke to a cautious stirring in the next room, some left-over worry from the night before brought Joyce out of bed with her heart in her mouth. It was only just light, but even so, if Gillian was going out to meet Roger, Joyce was determined that she must see her first. She hurried into her clothes, Micky from the foot of the bed, stretching himself drowsily and watching her with loving eyes.

"I don't think you'd better come," said Joyce.

She was barely dressed and still shoeless when the stairs creaked, so she ran to the door, calling Gillian in a whisper. She was too late, however, for the hall door was being gently unlatched. Struggling into her shoes, she looked from the window and received a shock. Gillian was dressed

for no morning stroll; she wore her best hat and long coat and carried a little case. She was almost running. . . . She was running away.

Joyce did not wait for a hat, but fled down the stairs as quietly as she could and along the drive after her friend. She was afraid to call her, lest she arouse the household, and when she reached the gate and Gillian was nowhere in sight, she stood still in despair. She could not possibly have reached the curve in the road in this short time, and yet where else could she have gone?

Joyce, looking wildly round her, saw the coppice leading to Brindlea and tried that. Far off already, Gillian was running between the trees. Joyce called to her but the birds were making such a din that it was no use, so she also began to run, stumbling over driftwood and stumps, catching her clothes on prickles in the underbrush, struggling for breath, with a despairing fear that she would never overtake that flying figure ahead.

Joyce had no time to think or wonder why Gillian was coming here if she were running away. Her only impulse was to catch her and tell her everything was all right and bring her back. When at last, fighting for breath, she reached the gate through which she had seen her cousin disappear, and there was no trace of her, she did not know what to do next.

Perhaps she was in the house talking to Roger—telling him!

Joyce tiptoed through the gate, saw the side door slightly open and, hearing no sound of voices, cautiously approached. There was not a movement anywhere, but when Joyce pushed the door a little, she saw lying at her feet a note in Gillian's handwriting. It was addressed to Roger Perch.

She must have just thrown it in then and gone on running? She must have gone down the drive and out into the road to Ferris Royale. It would be impossible to catch her now.

Joyce, almost in tears, looked this way and that, then seizing the letter and her courage, she knocked loudly at the door—loudly and impatiently till a maid came running.

"Mr. Perch. . . . I want Mr. Perch," cried Joyce. "Give him this note and tell him to come quickly. Oh, hurry!"

"Yes, miss . . . but I'm not sure he's up yet."

"Never mind. . . . Make him get up! . . . Do, please be quick."

The maid ran off and after what seemed an hour to Joyce, Roger came pelting through the hall.

"Miss Joyce, it's you? . . . Where is she? . . . What on earth has happened?"

Joyce, jumping up and down distractedly, cried out to him:

"She's running away. Get her back. . . . I've been run-

ning after her but couldn't catch her. Oh, please get your car and bring her back."

"Come along then." Roger, with a steadying arm around her which she did not even notice, led the way to the garage, brought out the car, pushed her into it, and started off down the drive.

2

"Now then, we'll soon overtake her," he said, smiling reassuringly. "Won't you tell me what is wrong?"

"Didn't she say in her note?" asked Joyce with caution.

"No, simply good-bye, because she had to go away."

"Are—are you in love with her?"

"Terribly!"

Joyce breathed a sigh of relief.

"That's a good thing. . . . That beastly old cat from the Lodge came and told mother Gillian was always at Brindlea. Mother was shocked and pitched into her. . . . But it's all right—she didn't really mean it . . . she was upset at the time. It's perfectly all right. They did it themselves, father and mother, when they were in love . . . met, I mean. I made them own up to it . . . and they told me to tell her not to worry, but she was asleep with her door locked, and I couldn't make her hear."

Her words fell out in a breathless flood. Roger smiled.

"You're a brick, Joyce. I rather guessed you were."

Joyce, crimson with astonishment and pleasure, gasped and then caught his arm.

"There she is! Oh!——w—w—what a relief!"

Roger drove as softly as he could after his flying love, for he wanted to take her by surprise.

"Hush!" he whispered to Joyce. "Don't breathe a word, or make a sound."

3

Gillian's steps had grown slower and slower, in spite of her haste and her fear, for the dark gentleman tucked under her coat was heavy to carry and none too still. He longed to get down and walk. Her shoulders ached terribly, and even the little case seemed to weigh a ton. She would have dropped it by the roadside, but she could not bear to abandon her father's pictures, all of him she had left in the world, and some other treasures too.

The sound of a car coming behind them made her heart race, and she held her darling close, even stopping a moment to push him further out of sight. Whatever happened, he must not be seen. She pulled her hat over her eyes and bent her head down, waiting for the car to go by.

It drew up, but she did not dare to look round, and she began to hurry again as fast as she could go. Perhaps it had a puncture or something. It couldn't be anyone coming after her. . . . She whispered to Jock so that he wouldn't

bark and give his hiding place away. And then something caught her from behind, she cried out and dropped her case in the road, and the dark gentleman raised his voice in a fury, struggling and barking to be free.

"I've frightened you, my poor little darling," cried Roger Perch, gathering girl and dog into his arms. Gillian leaned against him, white to the lips, still fiercely holding Jock the Scot.

"He mustn't be seen," she whispered weakly.

Jock, poking out his black head and recognizing a friend, ceased his din with an air of pleased surprise.

"Feel you can walk yet? . . . Come along then, and sit here against the car." Roger almost carried her, and Joyce thrust a cushion out to him as he came.

He drew Gillian down on the running board, still holding her in his arm. The dark gentleman lifted a nose to her face inquiringly and, her senses coming back, she tried to cover him up again, but Roger said:

"He's safe enough . . . let the old lad have a run. He's a heavy weight for you."

"But he mustn't be seen," she cried anxiously. "I've got to get him away before the police catch sight of him. They want to have him destroyed."

"My darling, the police are not looking for Jock the Scot. They came to hunt up a mastiff days ago; so I introduced the old lame lion as the only mastiff on the place, and the sergeant thought it was a splendid joke—made friends

with him on the spot and said he'd raise a great laugh if brought into court as a violent character."

He lifted the dark gentleman out of her arms and Jock shook himself, sneezed and hopped off to look round the car. Joyce, sitting mute and unnoticed, crept out at this amazing sight, and went down on her knees in the road to make friends.

Behind them, Gillian seemed to become fully aware of Roger's arm for the first time, but when she tried to move, he held her fast.

"I didn't think you'd get my note till I was miles off," she said.

"Nice way to treat me. Running away and leaving me broken-hearted. You knew I would be, so don't deny it."

"Oh, I didn't . . . and what could I do? That woman said they were going to have him destroyed and show you up. I thought we'd brought you nothing but trouble, and I had to run to keep him safe. . . . And she'd been spying on us too and told how I was always at Brindlea, and I couldn't explain. Aunt Helen thinks I've been running after you . . . and now it looks as if she was right," said Gillian, a smile dawning.

Roger kissed her on the mouth.

"I'll tell them all about running," he promised. "I'm not going to have the credit of my hard work taken away like that. Here have I been hard at it running after you for weeks and weeks."

"You haven't."

"Yes, but I did my running in a very subtle fashion, because I didn't want to frighten you while the patient was in the house. I have to be careful of the staff of my hospital."

"Oh, where's my case?" cried Gillian in sudden fright.

"Quite safe, look, lying there having a sun-bath, but you shouldn't interrupt like that, while I'm telling you how much I love you."

"It began—this running business—that very first day when you raced over to old Jock in a muddy coat with blood on his nose."

"I know that's not true because you simply laughed," she said severely.

"Yes, I laughed and then it happened. It wasn't because you went to his rescue. Any old frump with a heart of gold would have done as much. It was the scorn and lightning in your darling eyes," he told her. "It's strange when a quiet little pale bluebell suddenly gives a flash of lightning. You wouldn't believe. It's like magic. No wonder I haven't been the same man since."

"We are ridiculous, sitting out here at this hour of the morning."

"It's a lovely hour. Look at it shining all round you, so pleased to be up and about. Don't you like the poor little hour?"

He peered down at her, pretending to be anxious, and

she tried to smile, but she wanted to cry, and buried her face in his coat.

"I'm so glad you came," she said brokenly. "It's a perfect hour."

4

Joyce and Jock the Scot had behaved with the greatest discretion all this time, had hunted the opposite ditch together, walking softly and barely even glanced behind them. But the dark gentleman began to wonder what his lady was about, and at last hopped off, full of importance, to investigate. Joyce, failing to restrain him and quite unable to account for his place in the drama at all, followed cautiously.

"Here's my Jock," said Gillian's voice in greeting, and the black gentleman raced round the car, with every sign of delight.

Roger, turning his head at the sight of a hesitating shadow, smiled at Joyce's solemn face.

"All right, Joyce, she's better now. I've cured her of running away."

Gillian jumped up and rubbed her eyes.

"Joyce! I didn't know you were there. Am I dreaming?" she exclaimed.

"Another poor creature who's been running after you," said Roger. "See what a troublesome girl you are. She ran

and ran and couldn't catch you, so she nearly battered the door down until I came running too. She's a good batterer, Joyce; I can recommend her."

"Well, I wanted to tell you it was all right," said Joyce in eager extenuation. "Mother didn't mean anything. She told me to tell you, but I couldn't get in last night."

"Oh, Joyce," said Gillian gratefully.

Joyce, suddenly embarrassed, picked up the neglected case and brought it over to the car, but it fell open, depositing a number of articles in the road. The unfortunate and blushing cause of this mishap gathered up Gillian's pyjama suit and toothbrush in a great hurry, then stared at the sight of Roger Perch swooping upon what remained. They were five squares of rough cardboard with drawings and lettering on them, and Gillian was snatching them out of his hand.

"You were taking them with you," he whispered, his arm about her.

She said tremulously, smiling:

"I thought it was all he had left, of Brindlea and you."

"But what I can't make out," exclaimed Joyce in a puzzled voice, "is why you were taking the housekeeper's dog?"

They laughed. They had forgotten she didn't know him. Roger, lifting the dark gentleman, presented him to the lady.

"This," he said dramatically, "is the Mastiff of Brindlea, alias the Lame Lion, alias Jock-the-Scot, once called a mongrel at a tennis-party; rescued by a lovely lady; lured to Brindlea by a crafty ruffian, and now the owner of the entire place. An important fellow. Hop into the car and we'll tell you the tale-that-Jock-built."